

Good Friday – 2022

The Passion according to John

The cover art of our bulletin today may be unfamiliar to some of you. Some of you might not know what a Tenebrae service is.

The Service of Tenebrae means "Darkness" and is based on a twelfth-century service. It is a worship service for Good Friday or for Maundy Thursday which has been overlooked in recent times but has become a recovering meaningful worship service as a way to grow spiritually. Sometimes, the different characters in the Passion story are given to different individuals to read.

At one Church, not that long ago, on Good Friday, people gathered in the darkness and sat in silence waiting for the service to begin. The first person stood, read the assigned passage, and extinguished a candle. The congregation then sang one stanza of a hymn as the second person stood up. This pattern would be repeated as the service continued. After about the fifth reading, one of the leading members whispered in a voice loud enough for most of the congregation to hear, "I do not like this!"

That is precisely the point of Good Friday. We are not supposed to like what happened to Jesus. We should feel uncomfortable as we hear that Jesus was whipped and hung on a cross. Before we can celebrate the joy of Easter, we have to first experience Jesus' death.

Part of the reason this Good Friday gospel speaks to us is because of the way it is told. We would tell a story like this. This is not a fantasy tale in stylized language and glowing detail; this is a story for everyone.

In John's gospel, there are even particular details that suggest the primacy of the Fourth Gospel's historical value. John gives the name of the high priest's slave (Malchus, v. 10). John adds a significant detail about the relationship of Annas to Caiaphas (v. 13). He notes that the fire around which Peter sits with the servants is a "charcoal" fire (v. 18). He informs us that "religious" Jews would ritually defile themselves by entering the praetorium (v. 28). John adds a claim for eyewitness authority (19:35). John adds the reappearance of Nicodemus, who continues to pop up in the Fourth Gospel, representing the unsure but faithful seeker (19:39).

It is strange, perhaps an oxymoron, to refer to the day of Jesus' crucifixion and death as "Good Friday." The term "Good Friday" does not appear in the Bible, but the Bible does use the word "good" often to mean a satisfying experience of reality rather than to define a moral norm. It is most commonly used as an adjective to describe or appraise the beautiful feature, desirable quality or useful purpose of a person, thing, or event. For example, after God created light, he called it "good" (Genesis 1:4). God also called the Law "good" (Psalm 119:39; Romans 7:12). And Jesus said that the shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep is "good" (John 10:11).

In that sense, and for our benefit, then, this day is *Good* Friday. On this day, Jesus died, a sad event by all accounts, but we can call this day "Good" because by God's power, the error of Jesus' examination, condemnation and execution was reversed!

It may be likened to the parable of the wise old farmer:

This farmer was considered rich by the villagers because he owned a horse. One day, the horse ran away, and the villagers said to the farmer: "How unfortunate your horse ran away." And the farmer said, "How do you know it's unfortunate?" The next day, the horse returned bringing with it a wild horse, thereby making the farmer even richer. The villagers exclaimed,

"How fortunate." The farmer again said, "How do you know it's fortunate?" The following day, the farmer's son, while trying to tame the wild horse, was thrown from the horse, breaking his leg.

The villagers commented, "How unfortunate." And once again the farmer said, "How do you know it's unfortunate?"

The following day, the king's men rode through the village and took all the young men for the king's army. But they didn't take the farmer's son because of his broken leg.

What lesson can be drawn from this story? Often, things are not always as they appear to be. Today is Good Friday. Why did the people think this day, the crucifixion of Christ, was the worst day ever? Because Jesus, their friend, and the savior of the world, died.

But what happened three days later? The story appeared to be over! Jesus was dead and gone. But this was not the end of the story. Jesus rose from the dead.

In this day of "Good Friday," humanity is offered the hope, the promise, and the guarantee of salvation by God through Jesus the Christ. Salvation is God's gift to restore us to fellowship. Christ died to do more than get us past the judgment and help us escape hell. He became a human being, just like us, and died on Calvary's cross to remove any obstacles that would hinder us from being comfortable in his presence and to change us so that we can enjoy him in self-giving love now and forever.

In a radio poll taken about 20 years after the song was written, "The Old Rugged Cross" received over 6,000 votes more in a favorite hymn poll than its nearest competitor, "Nearer My God to Thee." But we sing "Nearer My God to Thee" because it is because of Jesus' sacrifice for us that we can come nearer to God – not just here and now, but forever, in this life and in the next. Christ, lifted up in death, draws us to him.

As Jesus dies for us, this day is about the hope, promise, and life forever. As the great American evangelist, D.L. Moody wrote: "Earth is receding, and Heaven is opening. It is my coronation day." That is what Good Friday and then what Easter is all about. Thanks to Christ's finished work, things of this earth are truly receding, and the gates of heaven are opening wide for us to walk through. In spite of darkness, the light gets brighter, and peace is nearer.