

Homily for Good Friday
Year B 02 April 2021
John 18:1-19:42
St Peter's Lutheran Church Elizabeth
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What do you see when you look at the cross? The sin of the world? Suffering, pain, loss? Sorrow, separation, death? All of that is present in the crucifixion. All of those things are the sword that pierced Mary's soul as she stood and watched. They can, however, also become the veil, the lens, that distorts our vision of the cross. They can keep us from seeing why this day is called Good Friday. We usually let the suffering of Jesus blind us to the love of God.

If today's just another day of suffering and brutality, a day to re-enact the execution of Jesus, then it makes no sense to think of this day as good. We must acknowledge, however, that good doesn't mean easy. The goodness of Good Friday doesn't eliminate the reality of sin, grief, suffering, and death. It means that these things aren't the ultimate reality of this day.

To fixate on the gory details of the crucifixion risks promoting a false view of what the cross of Christ accomplishes. That fixation portrays an angry God seeking retribution, payment, for humanity's sinfulness through the violent, bloody, torturous execution of Jesus. That's not the good news of Jesus.

The biblical accounts don't focus on the brutality and violence of the cross. For some reason we make that our focus. It's there, for sure, but that's not where scripture places the emphasis. St John doesn't offer graphic or bloody details. He simply states the facts:

- "One of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face" (18:22).
- "Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged" (19:1).
- "The soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head" (19:2).
- They kept "striking him on the face" (19:3).
- Jesus carried "the cross by himself" (19:17).
- "They crucified him" (19:18).

- Jesus said, “I am thirsty” (19:28).
- Jesus said, “‘It is finished.’ Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit” (19:30).
- After Jesus was already dead “one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear” (19:33-34).

For Jesus the focus isn't on suffering and death. It's on love. Love draws Jesus to yield to the cross. He doesn't look at the cross, he sees beyond it. Death isn't the end. Jesus trusts the Father's love more than his own death.

Peter, however, can neither look at the cross nor his friend, Jesus, who is dying. “I don't know him. I don't know him. I don't know him.” Peter fears that death is the end. For Jesus and for himself. In a sense he's right. Without love death is the end. Without love, without Jesus, the entire earth is simply a tomb.

There's no question that Jesus suffered and died. Mary suffered, cried, and had her heart broken by grief. Good Friday doesn't deny any of that. Those things were real in the crucifixion of Jesus and they're real in our own lives. We can't help but look at the crosses of our lives and world and see sin and brokenness, suffering, sorrow, tears, loss, and death.

But what if there's more to see? What if those things are simply the temple veil that Jesus' death tears down? What if we're to see love there as well? That's what makes Good Friday good. The crucified love of Christ is stronger and more real than death. The crucified love of Jesus does more than join us in our sufferings and dyings. It carries us through them. God's love defeats sin and death. Every time.

Every day we must decide which we trust more - death or love. Our decision determines our world view, guides our relationships, affects how we approach life, and colours our image of God. Can we see and trust the crucified love of Good Friday in our deaths, in the violence of our world, in our losses and sufferings, in the brutalities we experience, in the sins we commit? That's both the challenge and the hope Good Friday offers.

God bless you with the richness of his love this Good Friday and always. PG.