

Friday, April 15, 2022

Good Friday

John 18.1—19.42

The Rev. Michael K. Fincher

Service Live Streamed at:

<https://www.facebook.com/stgregorystlongbeach/videos/524516359265623>

(Sermon begins at about 33:15)

“Solidarity”

How do we begin to make sense of the horrific events that we commemorate on Good Friday? Theologians have been debating that pretty much since the first Good Friday. Trying to understand just what happened. Why it happened. Why it had to happen. And even how it happened. Not how as in the mechanics of Jesus being nailed on the cross, but how as in just how did Jesus’ death accomplish what we claim that it accomplished? That his death and subsequent resurrection defeated sin and death. In short, what is collectively known as atonement theory. Fear not. I am not even going to attempt to delve into atonement theory. Because between you and me, I don’t find any of the classical theories of the atonement particularly satisfying. Or, for that matter, particularly reasonable if our God is who we say God is: all loving, merciful, and compassionate. For me, the specifics of atonement are a great mystery, understanding of which is way above my paygrade. That it ultimately boils down to a matter of faith. One of the central tenants of our faith as Christians.

And yet. And yet. We still feel a need for some sort of explanation to help us understand just a little of what this has been all about. As in such truly unexplainable events, there are undoubtedly a variety of ways of looking at what happened on Good Friday. Of explaining why Jesus had to die on the cross. I think one of the best explanations—at least one that makes about as much sense as any, at least for me—is solidarity. That Jesus underwent suffering and death out of solidarity with us.

The Rev. Canon Stephanie Spellers, the Presiding Bishop’s Canon for Evangelism, Reconciliation, and Creation provides a beautiful definition of solidarity, particularly as it relates to our Christian faith. She writes, “*Solidarity is love crossing the borders drawn by self-centrism, in order to enter into the situation of the other, for the purpose of mutual relationship and struggle that heals us all and enacts God’s beloved community.*”¹

Love crossing the borders . . . to enter into the situation of the other, for the purpose of mutual relationship and struggle that heals us all and enacts God’s beloved community. This one statement says it all when it comes to defining what Good Friday is about.

Love crossing the borders. Our faith, our experience, tells us that God is love. Pure love. Through the Incarnation, the act of God coming among us in the flesh in the form of his Son Jesus, God—Love itself—crossed the border that previously separated Creator from created. The border between immortal and mortal. The border between divine and human. And in the events we commemorate this day and over the coming days, Jesus Christ crossed that same border. Making that border more permeable for all.

Entering into the situation of the other. God, love incarnate in the flesh, as a human being. Entering into the human situation. To be one of us. To live as one of us. To experience life as one of us. The good and the bad. The beautiful and the ugly. Including that which we humans typically fear most. That which Jesus fully entered into and embraced on Good Friday: suffering and death.

For the purpose of mutual relationship and struggle. Relationship between God and humanity, as we see in the Old Testament, was not going as well as God would have liked. God tried. We tried. But it is just so hard to be in relationship, true relationship, with a deity whom we cannot readily see or touch. Since we could not become as God, God chose to become as us. For the primary purpose of being in relationship with us. To be in face-to-face, flesh-to-flesh relationship. To be able to share in our joys and our struggles, side-by-side with us.

All with the ultimate purpose of healing us all and enacting God's beloved community. Which brings us to today. To Good Friday. Certainly, the ultimate healing that occurs as a result of love crossing the border was the breaking of two profound borders that have separated us from our God: sin and death. Through his death on the cross and what follows—the time between now and Easter—Christ has defeated sin and death, paving the way for forgiveness and for eternal life. The healing of all that separates us from God. Forgiveness being a healing that has been realized and that we enjoy even now. And eternal life being a healing that has already begun, but which will not be fully realized until our own deaths, when we cross the boundary that divides this realm from the heavenly realm.

And when Canon Spellers says that this heals us all, that includes Godself. That the pain and sorrow of distance, even separation from those God created as companions, has been removed. Through reconciliation with God, even God is healed.

But there is additional healing that comes through this crossing of the boundary between us and God. That is the ongoing healing that comes through solidarity with God in Christ. The ongoing healing that comes with the knowledge that we are not alone. That our God is with us at all times, in all aspects of our lives. That God is even with us—that God is especially with us—in our suffering, in our pain, in our disappointments. That, no matter what we are experiencing, no matter what we are feeling, God is with us. And not just with us as an observer. God is truly with us, having experienced profound suffering and loss through the crucifixion. Suffering and loss that, if anything, God has experienced twice. As the Son being crucified, and as the Father helplessly looking on. So even when no one else can even begin to fathom what we are personally going through, we can be assured that God does know. Because God has been there, experiencing suffering and loss as deep as any we have suffered. And God continues to be with us, supporting us, as we experience whatever we are going through.

Philip Yancey, in his book *Where is God When it Hurts?* summarizes what happened on Good Friday: "The image Jesus left with the world, the cross, the most common image in the Christian religion, is proof that God cares about our suffering and pain. He died of it. Today the image is coated with gold and worn around the necks of beautiful girls, a symbol of how far we can stray from the reality of history. But it stands, unique among all religions of the world. Many of them

have gods. But only one has a God who cared enough to become a man and to die.”² And I would add, only one has a God who cared enough to experience suffering and loss, for us and with us.

Today, Good Friday, is the ultimate proof that God is not some distant, absent, uncaring god. Proof that God was and continues to be here in the trenches with us. In solidarity with us. Out of love for us. Continuing to cross boundaries to be with us, to enter into the human condition, to be in relationship with us, to bring healing and wholeness to us and our broken and hurting world. Seeking to bring about God’s beloved community here and now, where we are not only reconciled with our God, but also with one another. And amazingly enough, that is only the beginning. There is more. As Jesus promised, the fullness of healing and wholeness will be fully realized in just a few days’ time.

¹ Stephanie Spellers, *The Church Cracked Open: Disruption, Decline and New Hope for Beloved Community* (New York:, Church Publishing, 2021), 107, quoted in “Christ Suffers with Us,” Center for Action and Contemplation, April 8, 2022. <https://cac.org/christ-suffers-with-us-2022-04-08/>.

² Philip Yancey, “Daily Dig” email, Plough, March 27, 2022. <https://www.plough.com/en/subscriptions/daily-dig/even/march/daily-dig-for-march-27>