

**Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Houston, TX**  
**Good Friday Sermon**  
**7 April 2023**

**John 18:1-19:42**

There were many travelers visiting the great city of Jerusalem on that Friday when Jesus of Nazareth was crucified. One traveler in particular was conducting some commerce at a local market stall when he heard the commotion. The spectacle was both fascinating and shocking at the same time. He watched with morbid curiosity as the condemned passed by. There was a festival atmosphere in the streets, as young and old participated in the macabre show. He thought to himself, "The accused must be a truly devious criminal, for he is the most hated man I have ever seen." Whatever his crimes, the traveler could well certify that the man was paying dearly for them. His open wounds were bleeding and his naked body was covered in welts. His tormentors seemed to be deriving great pleasure in insulting and mocking him. The traveler wondered for a moment about the man and his crimes. But, as soon as the death march passed him by, he went back to his business and tried to forget the horror show which by now had become all too common in this filthy power-keg of a city.

Had the traveler taken the time to inquire, he might have found out that this particular execution was different to any execution he had ever witnessed or heard about. The man being executed was Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet whose name means "Yahweh saves." He would have learned that this man was the long awaited, long announced Messiah of Israel. He was the Prophet like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-19;) Elijah returned (Malachi 4:5-6;) the Son of David's line (Isaiah 11:1ff;) the Son of Man of Daniel (Daniel 7:13-14;) the Suffering Servant of Isaiah (Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-11; and 52:13-53:12;) the Prophet, Priest and King announced by the Old Testament; he was "no mere man; no third party, no angel, but God himself, present in a unique way in the person and the sufferings of Jesus on Calvary" (Green, *The Empty Cross of Jesus*, 29).

Had the traveler taken the time to inquire into this Jesus, he would have found out that although Jesus was the light of the world, he entered into a world filled with darkness for our sake. He was born in the darkness; he was surrounded by the darkness of the human heart while he was on this earth; he prayed in the darkness; was betrayed in darkness; was accused and tried in darkness; died in darkness; and was ultimately buried in darkness. He endured darkness, so that we, who live in darkness, might have the light of eternal life.

In him the greatest contradictions in human history became incarnate to show the world the extent to which God's love will go to save sinners. He who was sinless spent his life with sinners; he who was a friend of humanity was surrounded by enemies; he who was the great physician was ultimately afflicted with all the disease of our sin; he who came to be "the Way" to heaven, himself walked the way to hell; he who was the

“truth” was convicted because of false witnesses; he who was all powerful became despised, so that through his “wounds we might be healed” (For more see: Kvamme, “Profiles of the Christ”, 29-32.)

The traveler would have found out that the cross the accused was carrying had taken on a significance of cosmic proportions because of the man carrying it, for this was no ordinary human, but God himself. The scene unfolding before him was the most unique act of love the world would ever see: a just man was dying for the sins of the whole world. This cross showed that “God is not alienated by the mess we have got the world into: he is not against us. Rather, he loves us so much that there is nothing, literally nothing he will not endure for us” (Green, 30). The suffering of the accused was voluntary and he had the power to stop it at any time, but like a sheep going to the slaughterhouse, he endured silently this great humiliation for the sake of the whole world.

Had the traveler cared to know more about Jesus, he would have found out that the grotesque scene unfolding in Jerusalem was the great rescue mission God had set into motion from the beginning of the world, to bring his whole creation back to himself through the passion of his Son. Simply put, the traveler would have known that the accused was dying for him! Perhaps then he would have contemplated the scene with less apathy, and on bended knee he would have said, “My God and My Lord!”

My friends, even as Jesus dies on the cross for the world today, many of us are like that traveler in Jerusalem. We let the horror of the moment capture our minds for just a few minutes, but then we go on with our lives, undisturbed and unchanged. The reaction of most of the world is worse than this, however. The world’s response is almost complete apathy. Christianity is in the decline and many people around the globe are not even able to place Jesus within a specific historical time. He has become irrelevant to many people who ignore the fact that he died for them.

Even as the nails break in flesh and crush bones, the world remains engulfed in its darkness. We see this darkness every time a shooter enters a school and kills innocent children in the name of misguided ideologies or plain hatred. We see this darkness every time another tyrant forgets that they are human and transitory and feel as though they will live forever. And because they think no one will ever hold them to account, they invade innocent nations and kill thousands of people. We see this darkness every time we watch, hear, or read the news and are confronted with the ways in which politicians polarize us and weaponize our fears. We see this darkness every time those who claim to speak for God spend more time judging and laying heavy burdens on others than on proclaiming a Gospel of love and radical hospitality. We see this darkness every day and everywhere.

As the Messiah dies, many go on with their lives, undisturbed by the suffering of the Messiah, blind to his anguish, and deaf to his cries. Even as our Messiah dies in intolerable pain, abandoned by all, alone and despised, many carelessly continue to turn their backs on him.

I invite all of you to let this death change you, as it changed Jesus' mother and his disciples. Let his blood wash you and cleanse you. Let his sacrifice fill your life with gratitude and love. And for the next two days, reflect on how this death changes things. How nothing can be the same after this death. This death breaks the curtain of the temple and builds the gulf of separation between God and humanity. This death marks a new beginning for the Church and for us individually. This death leads to new tomorrow. Start dreaming today of a new tomorrow. God is on the move. Our vindication is near. May he continue to bless you, Amen!