

Crucified, Died, Was Buried

John 19:16-42

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Although this is Palm Sunday, it's also called Passion Sunday. "Passion" refers to Jesus' suffering. As we continue going through the Gospel according to John, we're going to focus on Jesus' crucifixion today. Sometimes we jump from Palm Sunday to Easter so we almost skip the suffering and death of Jesus. I don't want us to miss that part of the Gospel.

Once again, I want us to walk through a section of John's Gospel, to get inside it and experience it. We want to see who Jesus is and what he does for us.

We re-tell this story every Sunday when we say the Apostles' Creed. The outline for this section is in one line of the Creed: Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord ... "was crucified, died, and was buried" (*The United Methodist Hymnal* #882). Let's expand that outline and enter in to what God has done for us and offers us in Jesus.

16b-24 After much questioning and debate, Pilate nervously gives in to the Jewish leaders' argument that Jesus is dangerous to Roman rule and he hands Jesus over to some soldiers for execution. Still, Jesus is giving his life, laying down his life on his own. John emphasizes that Jesus carries his own cross. The other Gospels tell about a man named Simon that the Romans conscript to carry the cross. Probably, Jesus begins to carry the cross beam himself. Then, weakened by the beating and flogging he's received, he's unable to carry it all the way to the execution site, so the soldiers get Simon to carry it the rest of the way. Jesus bears the cross as the one who bears the sin of the world.

The Roman method of execution for slaves and rebels was crucifixion. Sometimes the victim was tied to the cross. Other times, like here, the victim was fastened to a wooden cross with nails driven through the wrists and feet or ankles. Then the cross was lifted up and the person was left to die from exposure, blood loss, and suffocation. Some crucified people were on the cross for days before they died.

The sign on the cross declared the charge against Jesus. But it spoke more truth than Pilate or the others realized. Jesus really is King. He rules from a cross. The sign is in three languages: Hebrew or Aramaic—that was the local language; Latin, the language of Rome; and Greek, the common language that was spoken throughout the world. Jesus, lifted up on the cross, draws all people to himself (12:32). He's dying for everyone. This is how God loved *the world*: God gave his only Son so that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life (3:16).

A long time ago I read this quotation about the cross. It comes from George MacLeod of a Christian community in Scotland:

I simply argue that the cross be raised again at the centre of the market place as well as on the steeple of the church. I am recovering the claim that Jesus was not crucified in a cathedral between two candles, but on a cross between two thieves; on the town garbage heap; at a crossroad so cosmopolitan that they had to write his title in Hebrew and in Latin and in Greek ... at the kind of place where cynics talk smut, and thieves curse, and soldiers gamble. Because that is where he died. And that is what he died about. And that is where churchmen should be and what churchmen should be about. (quoted in R. Paul Stevens, *The Other Six Days*)

There's a little fussing between the Jewish chief priests and the Roman governor Pilate. They don't like that he wrote "Jesus is the King of the Jews." They want it to say that he *claimed to be* the king of the Jews. Pilate apparently has had enough of dealing with them. He stubbornly says, "What I have written, I have written." It's not going to change.

John records the soldiers' gambling for Jesus' clothes as a fulfillment of Scripture (Psalm 22:18). Earlier, Jesus laid aside his outer clothes to serve as a slave washing the disciples' feet (13:4-5). Now he lays aside his clothes as he lays down his life.

There's a lot of fulfillment language here. "We can trust the truth of Scripture; Christ keeps all of God's promises" (Marva Dawn, "John," *The Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible*).

19:25-27 Four soldiers crucify Jesus. Four women stay near his cross. They are Jesus' mother and aunt, a woman named Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. We don't know much about them. Jesus' mother isn't named in this Gospel, but of course we know she's Mary. We don't know who her sister is and we don't know who Clopas is. This is the first mention of Mary Magdalene in John's Gospel. Her name comes from her village, Magdala on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee. She will appear again at the tomb of Jesus.

In contrast to Jesus' other disciples who have gone into hiding, these women are examples of genuine discipleship. They show love and faithfulness to Jesus.

One of the male disciples is here: "the disciple whom he loved." This is likely the apostle John, son of Zebedee, one of the Twelve. When Jesus sees his mother and this disciple standing near the cross, he says to her, "Woman, here is your son" and to John, "Here is your mother."

As Jesus gives himself for us, he gives us to each other. In this act of caring for his mother and this disciple, Jesus demonstrates Christian fellowship. To come to Jesus is to come into fellowship with each other on the level ground beneath the cross.

19:28-30 "I am thirsty." We see the reality of Jesus' humanity and suffering. He knows our need and our pain, our thirst.

"It is finished." Jesus completed his mission, the work the Father sent him to do.

Still in control, "He gave up his spirit." No one took his life. He laid it down willingly.

19:34-37 The blood and water flowing from his side again show the reality of Jesus' humanity and death. He came all the way to be with us and to be one of us. He went through everything, even death, for us to save us.

The blood of Jesus again reminds us that he is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world—including yours and mine. The water flowing from his side reminds us that he is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, who gives living water. He who thirsted on the cross is the source of living water that makes us never thirst.

An eyewitness encourages us to believe this account. Put your faith in the one who died for you. Trust him with your life and enter into a new life.