

“What might have been”

- If it is darkest just before the dawn, then it is true that Good Friday stands as the darkest day in the church year
 - With almost 48 hours left to go before the dawning of our new day
 - It gives us an opportunity, I think, to ponder what might have been, and what seemed to be at the first Friday evening
 - When it seemed to the disciples that everything Jesus was, everything he stood for, everything he taught, was killed and buried in a tomb
 - Cut short- taken from them too soon
 - For if the powers that be, that is the Roman army with its military might
 - The temple authorities protecting their own self interest
 - If they have the ability to stop Jesus, then what does that say about God?
 - What does that say about God’s ability to reach us, to save us...
 - If Good Friday is the end, where does that leave you and me?
 - Where is hope?
 - I think the tradition in the church tries to reflect this reality just a bit- this moment in time when so much is at stake and in the balance
 - If Good Friday were the final chapter, then there would be no sacraments.
 - Perhaps that is the reason we do not bless bread and wine on this day
 - Instead we serve yesterday’s consecrated bread and wine
 - Little memories of Grace from last night when Jesus was still alive
 - When he gave the disciples the new commandments to love one another, serve one another,
 - And told them to remember him when they ate and drank together
 - We also traditionally do not have funerals today
 - Because they are Easter liturgies, and if Good Friday is the end, then there are no Easter liturgies
 - The altar is even bare, because there is no cause for decoration or celebration
 - We even consume or burn all blessed elements and oils annually this week, and for us today
 - The church is literally emptied of sacred, blessed things

- All in an attempt to get us thinking of what might have been when Jesus was crucified and buried, and had that been the end of the story
- No church, sacraments, no grace
- A God that did not prevail
- We know Easter is coming- we have done this every year for many centuries
- But the disciples were going through this for the first time
- How could it be that God had forsaken Jesus so utterly?
- How could it be that God had let the oppressive Romans and Jewish establishment win and kill the Messiah?
- How could it be that their hopes were kindled, and then extinguished so quickly
- You may be wondering- I am sure the disciples were wondering- how did it come to this?
 - Honestly, it is not that hard to see how Jesus ended up on that cross
 - It is not hard to connect the dots of cause and effect here
 - Simply put, Jesus was perceived as a threat, the religious authorities in bed with Rome have all been plotting to take him out for some time now
 - Ever since he entered Jerusalem with palm branches and shouts of Hosanna... and turned over the money changing tables
 - By virtue of Jesus not ceasing his teaching, by virtue of Jesus continuing toward Jerusalem with his message of God's love for everyone
 - Especially the unloveable, the sinful, the unrighteous, the unwanted
 - With his constant critique, and rightfully so, of the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the government
 - Jesus has undermined, or started to erode, their positions of power and wealth, and respect.
 - Branding Jesus a criminal and having him executed was a simple, if unethical, plan to just get rid of him.
 - And Jesus, insisting on doing God's work, insisting on being God's incarnate presence in this world, would not stop- never gave up
 - And so they arrested him, beat him, convicted him, and sentenced him to death
 - God, in the flesh, so determined to call us back to covenant, to relationship, that even the threat of death did not deter Jesus
 - But now what?
- It is so very tempting to skip today and to just stay home and not think about it

- After all, we know that Jesus does not stay in this tomb
- And that soon we will be celebrating once again with incense, brass, and fire
- And also, it's tempting to skip today because it is not easy to be reminded of the cross.
- It represents the absolute worst in humanity, in us, in me.
- How humanity can be so cruel and will sometimes do everything in its power to prevent goodness and hope from prevailing
- To maintain the status quo even when it means killing an innocent man
- While you and I were not there that day when they crucified our Lord, we could have been
- We could have been cheering Hosannah earlier in the week
- We too could have abandoned him, we too could have hid
- And we too could have shouted "crucify him".
- Yet here we are, facing headlong into what was one of the worst days on earth
- When God's power, perseverance, and long-suffering love for us was put to the test.
- But you must go through Good Friday in order to get to Easter.
- You must go through death to get to resurrection.
- We are here because today we see the worst, and tomorrow night we see God overcome it
- Knowing that through this darkness does come light
- Through the sin comes forgiveness and reconciliation
- Through death God brings hope and resurrection
- God can do the impossible-
- God can take the vicious cross- a symbol of death, despair, and oppression, and turn it into one of hope and salvation
- That not even death, the final and ultimate separation, cannot stop God's love and keep us away from God.
- I find a great deal of honesty in our service today
- Because there are times in our lives where we find ourselves much like the disciples- unable to see hope
- Where once we found meaning, happiness, and fullness, now we find emptiness and darkness
- Sometimes, like it did so many years ago, it seems like hope has lost, and despair has won
- Death is final.
- God is missing in action

- But like so many years ago, our hope is not truly lost.
- Good Friday exists to remind us that even at the darkest points in our lives when everything we love and value seems threatened or gone
- God is able to overcome it, because God was already able to overcome the worst of things and proved that there is always hope.
- Tonight, I invite you today to think about What Almost Was
 - To witness the darkness and the hopelessness and the worst that is in us
 - To take a good look, because tomorrow that is exactly what God overcomes
 - If God can overcome this, the worst, God can overcome anything.
 - Today is indeed a Good Friday.

Amen.