

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"Good Friday"

Scripture: Matthew 27:21-25 (Matthew 26:36-46)

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A reflection for 'From Despair to Praise'

April 19, 2019

Today we've invited you to gather round closely
To hear that well-known story
About the betrayal and accusation,
Judging and sentencing,
Torture and death of an innocent man named Jesus.

We've invited you to gather round closely
Because while the story is familiar to many,
Our tendency is to keep it at a distance.

That is, we hear about those sleepy disciples,
a murderous mob,
And an unjust ruler,
And we judge these people.

What kind of friends won't stay awake for their buddy?
What kind of crowd presses for summary executions?
What kind of leader hands out death sentences
To innocent victims?

We judge these people.
We keep them at a distance.
We believe we are categorically different.

But are we any different?
Think about it for a moment.

Are we really all that different?

We many never have been directly involved
In the death of an innocent...

But haven't there been times when we've been too tired to care?
Despite the pleading of a loved one? Maybe?

And haven't there been times when we've failed to do what is right,
Even participated in what was wrong?

PAUSE

Think about the last time you walked in to a gossip session.
A little character assassination over morning coffee.
So did you say something to stop it
Or did you just sit there with your mouth shut
Implicitly endorsing what was being said?

Maybe you added some scandalous stories of our own?
You wouldn't be the only one.

Think about the last time someone asked you for assistance.
A couple bucks for some food, or a few minutes of your time.
So did you stop and give them attention
Or just send them away with your 'thoughts and prayers'?

Most of us have done this.

And has there been a time, a situation in your life,
When you haven't simply hoarded what God has given you,
But have taken what isn't yours?

We too have done what is wrong
And failed to do what is right.
We can count off many sins of commission
And many sins of omission.

This all speaks against us judging those characters in today's story.

If Jesus is a symbol of everything good
We too have conspired to kill him.
We are the tired disciples.
We are the mob.
We are Pilate.

We, who so easily judge others,
Find ourselves judged by the cross.

And the words of the Bible are proven true:
"There is no one righteous, not even one."ⁱ

But if we have failed to do what is right
And have continued to do what is wrong
Or have simply been too tired or too lazy to care...

Is there any hope for us?
Do we have anything to look forward to
On a dreary Good Friday morning?

Well you should know that it is no mistake
That today is called 'Good' Friday.

Yes, on this day we have crucified Jesus.

But on this day of treachery and murder,
God's grace is offered to us.

The same cross that pronounces our guilt
Also proclaims our salvation.

Listen to the prophet Isaiah:

"But he was pierced for **our** transgressions,
he was crushed for **our** iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds **we are healed.**"ⁱⁱ

By his wounds we are healed.

We have put Jesus on the cross.
And yet he doesn't resist our wickedness.

In that divine exchange
It is by his death and his suffering
That he will save his persecutors,
That he will save us from our sin.

PAUSE

Today we are gathered around closely.

I encourage you to open your heart
And draw near to the story.

For when you see yourself in the story
You will recognise your need for mercy
And will be surprised to discover that there is forgiveness
And grace.

Let us pray

Holy God our faith wobbles and totters.
We long to stand up for what we believe,
but it is easier to wash our hands of responsibility.

We yearn be principled and courageous,
but it is easier to defer to the judgments of others
and simply go along with the crowd.

We dream of following Jesus to the end,
but it is easier to slip into the darkness
and betray the spirit striving within us.

Forgive us, O God,
For all the ways in which we have failed you.

Help us to find courage in the dying of the light
Where evil spreads its wings and takes flight.
Help us to welcome your grace in the dawning of a new day
Where we see the victory of forgiveness and grace.

We ask this in Jesus' name.
And we pray together, that simply prayer
That he taught his first disciples, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

ⁱ Romans 3:10 NIV

ⁱⁱ Isaiah 53:5 NIV