

ST. ANDREW'S UNITED CHURCH
April 10, 2020 Good Friday

Prelude

Welcome

Hello, my friends. Today we reflect on the journey of Jesus to the cross. The story of Christ's crucifixion is a surreal one: there is the great swing of emotion from Palm Sunday exuberance to the dark night of Christ's soul at Gethsemane and ultimately a cross.

It is a journey with shocking betrayal and friends letting Jesus down. It is a story seen through the prism of reality in our world. Systems that harm, that scapegoat, that deny all around us. When we hear this story through the lens of our present reality - daily COVID-19 reports, our efforts to socially distance ourselves from friends and neighbours, but some people in our community don't comply - well when we look at our world today, the Good Friday story seems startlingly relevant.

Lighting the Christ Candle

So let us immerse ourselves for a few minutes in worship.

Let us breathe for a moment as we light this Christ candle.

Breathe deeply... life, love, peace. *(candle is lit)*

Breathe in Holy Spirit. We need that Spirit to guide our Good Friday journey. Be with us on this journey, Source of Life. Amen.

Call to Worship

Today the carpenter's hands are nailed to a cross, the king of kings is crowned with thorns and wears the purple robe of mockery.

Today he sets us free, himself imprisoned on a tree.

Today is God's Friday. Let us worship. Let us reflect.

Hymn: VU #133 Go to Dark Gethsemane

Go to dark Gethsemane, you that feel the tempter's power;
your Redeemer's conflict see; watch with him one bitter hour;
turn not from his grief away: learn from him to watch and pray.

See him at the judgement hall, beaten, bound, reviled, arraigned;
see him meekly bearing all; love to all his soul sustained.
Shun not suffering, shame, or loss: learn from Christ to bear the cross.

Calvary's mournful mountain view; there the Lord of glory see,
made a sacrifice for you, dying on the accursed tree.
"It is finished," hear his cry: trust in Christ and learn to die.

Bible Readings

Psalm 22: 1-5

Listen to these aching words of lament from the Psalm writer. This is from Psalms Chapter 22.

My god, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?

O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
and by night, but find no rest.

Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.

In your ancestors trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.

To you they cried, and were saved;
in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.

John 18:28-40

From the Gospel of John, glimpse of the journey of Jesus towards the cross – here Jesus encounters Pilate.

Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?"

They answered, "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you."

Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law." The Jewish leaders replied, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death." (This was to fulfill what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?"

Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?"

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here."

Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?"

Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

Pilate asked him, “What is truth?”

After he had said this, he went out to the leaders again and told them, “I find no case against him. But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?”

They shouted in reply, “Not this man, but Barabbas!” Now Barabbas was a bandit.

Reflection

I don't think I'm being radical to say that the world is not always fair. The journey through injustice and oppressive systems is messy.

Christ died. Crucifixions still happen around us all the time; people are victimized in many different ways by unfair systems, near & far.

Pilate and Jesus were part of a system – I think that Pilate admired Jesus. Pilate, with power, made a choice to reinforce his system. The religious elite (John's Gospel simply calls them the “Jews”) – the religious leaders had the authority to be charitable towards Jesus, but, well, they made a choice to demand his execution.

And those crowds, they went with popular sentiment – execute him.

Jesus died, yes. But that is not at all the end of the Story. I need to say that God will offer an Easter twist that will change so much. But the systems of injustice that humans choose to maintain, survive.

I leave you with a question and invitation: When I say the word “injustice”, what situation immediately comes to your mind?

This Good Friday, I invite you to respond to **one** injustice. Learn about it if you don't already understand it. Research how people are trying to create change that broken system, and, let your heart guide you to respond; in prayer. That is important. Prayer makes a difference, first and foremost changing us. Hopefully you will find one tangible action to support the people and organizations who are challenging that unjust system.

The Good Friday biblical story is about a succession of many people who had a choice to act in support of Jesus. Instead they made choices to passively watch, or betray, to deny, and to scapegoat. God encircles us in love and care in these tough days. This tough day. Please remember that, God loves you and I as we muddle in it all. Remember that God's love for and in you needs to shine, to be shared, shared in our encounters with people.

- God's love interrupts unjust systems, through you and me. Amen.

Closing Hymn: VU #136 O Come and Mourn with Me Awhile

O come and mourn with me awhile;

O come now to the Saviour's side;

O come together let us mourn: Jesus, our Love, is crucified.

Have we no tears to shed for him,
while soldiers scoff and foes deride?
Ah! Look how patiently he hangs: Jesus, our Love, is crucified.

Seven times he spake, seven words of love;
and all three hours his silence cried
for mercy on the souls of all: Jesus our Love, is crucified.

O love of God! O sin-filled world!
In this dread act your strength is tried,
and victory remains with love: Jesus, our Love, is crucified.

Prayers of the Community

God of power and love, may all your children everywhere know your goodness. Help us to become more perfect witnesses of your grace so that all may see you in us. We pray for our leaders that you may guide their hearts and minds so all may live in peace and justice. Call our rulers to account, so that all your children across this global village may enjoy justice, peace, and freedom and a fair share of the goodness of creation.

We give thanks especially for health care workers, for first responders and all those who work in what our governments deem essential services, give them strength and health and may they take time to notice how grateful we who self isolate are.

Let us walk today into the wisdom of God. Jesus does not mislead us. He who is the Way, will not guide us into blind alleys and desert wastes. He who is the truth does not mock us with deceit and lies. He who is the life will not betray us with delusions that bring death. May Christ's wisdom sustain not just us but all who are weary. Let his strength give courage to all who endure, so that none will falter or lose heart. Let his faith bring light to all who believe, so that together we cry out for justice, and live with grace and mercy.

Beyond brokenness is love inexhaustible.
Beyond death is love incomparable.
Breathe your spirit over the whole earth, O God,
Show us your resurrection world.
Birth in us your new creation. Amen.

(Dave blows out the candle)

Call to Worship from *Celebrate God's Presence: A Book of Services for The United Church of Canada*. ©2000 The United Church Publishing House.

Prayers of the Community included a prayer by Christine Sine at www.godspace-msa.com

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