

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"The Worst Thing About Good Friday"
Dr. J. Dent

April 2, 2010
Good Friday

The message of the Cross always takes us by surprise. This is partly because there is so much more going on than what we originally thought. The Lord's experience on what we call Good Friday was complicated at many levels.

He had experienced the comfort and care of his closest friends. He prayed with the three closest. He opened his heart and told them what was going to happen, but they couldn't seem to process it, which are many of our experiences in the midst of hearing that a loved one only has so long to live. It was even more complicated for the disciples because Jesus was in good health, as far as we know, there was nothing to suggest that he wouldn't live a long time and usher some earthly kingdom as the Messiah, at least that's what the disciples probably were thinking.

But it didn't turn out that way. God through Jesus had a different plan. And so Jesus had to go through the agony of his disciples falling asleep on him in the early hours of Good Friday. Jesus had to experience the betrayal of one of the twelve. He knew it was going on, yet still grieved for Judas' decision to come against God's plan. Jesus didn't try to take control. He let unfold what would unfold. He told the disciples just before being arrested that he could command thousands of angels in a split second. They could wipe out the Roman army and change world history. But that wasn't the plan. It wasn't the Father's plan.

Then there was the arrest and at the same time the healing of the servant's ear. Even in Jesus' darkest hour, he was still healing. Then there was the mocking of the soldiers, and the spitting in his face, the punching, the placing of the crown of thorns. There was the Jewish trial, conducted without appropriate notice, laced with false witnesses. Jesus admits he is the Messiah. They convict him of blasphemy. The high priest even tears his robes in supposed shock of Jesus' statement. The Scripture commands the High Priest to never do this, but he did. The Jews hand Jesus over to the Romans for execution.

Pilate finds nothing worthy of the death penalty, in fact, he has broken no crimes under Roman law. Then the Jews accuse him of sedition and treason

against the Roman empire. They say he claims to be a king. They claim anyone who does not admit allegiance to Caesar and is actively leading a rebellion, should be put to death. Pilate has several interviews with Jesus. Jesus admits to Pilate that he is a king, but not in the sense that the Jews are alleging. Pilate continues to find Jesus not guilty. But because the crowd seems unruly and because they want to see something happen to him, he allows Jesus to be scourged. If you have seen the Passion of the Christ, you know something of scourging. Jesus has already been beat up by the soldiers. He has already been mocked by them and by Herod, who wanted to see some miracle as a form of entertainment.

The scourging leaves Jesus ripped up on the outside, bleeding profusely. He is a horror to look at now. Pilate shows him to the crowd, to see how badly he has been punished, thinking this will settle them down and satisfy their need for whatever revenge they are looking for. But then Pilate makes the mistake of asking the crowd what they want done with Jesus. They say "Crucify." This was tantamount to swearing at the governor. This was the lowest form of torturing to death known in the civilized world. It was horrific in every way. It was slow. Wild animals would tear at the bodies, often while they were still alive. It was not for Jesus, in Pilate's mind. This man did not deserve this. So, he tries again to get out of executing Jesus.

Pilate gives the crowd the choice of letting go a notorious murderer, who had been convicted and was well known for the crime he committed, or Jesus, who was a rabbi and a gentle man, who was only known for the good things he had done. You know, and I know they chose Barabbas. And Jesus was sentenced to be crucified, by an unwilling Pilate who literally washed his hands of the whole affair.

Jesus was already in great pain, he had suffered many extreme injustices. What was the worst thing for him that day in history we remember today? Was it the injustice? Was it the pain?

Jesus had been misunderstood all his life. There were many injustices he had experienced and yet the only anger we seem to see in his life is when the Temple is being treated like a marketplace, and he upturns the usurious money changers' tables. We don't hear of any anger.

We also don't hear about the pain he is experiencing. The only time we hear expressions of need in the midst of pain is when he says he thirsts from the

cross. So he takes the pain as it comes. I have experienced different levels of pain over the years and I'm sure you have too. I wish I could say that I have been brave in facing pain. I have not. My migraines have reduced me to tears. My various times in bed have not made me a good patient. Illness and pain is inconvenient, at the best of times. Some of us have chronic pain issues that we need all kinds of support to manage. Some of us deal with it well, some don't.

Jesus faced his pain, in the Garden, with the soldiers, during the scourging, carrying the heavy cross, being nailed to it, dying on it. Yet I don't think this was even the worst thing he experienced of all the bad things that happened to him on Good Friday.

He was taking the sins of the world upon himself. He experienced the weight of this and it literally broke his heart. That's one medical opinion of why he died so fast on the cross. Yet I wonder if even that was the worst thing of what he experienced.

So what was the worst thing? While Jesus was on the cross, the presence of the Lord withdrew from him, while the sin of the world was placed upon him. God the Father would not be present to such sin and so the absence of the Father was a brand new experience for Jesus. He had known the Father's presence and love, his care and support throughout eternity, in the Trinity before his incarnation and now throughout his earthly life.

But now Jesus knew loneliness. He never knew it before, it wasn't in his existence as God within the community of the Trinity. Now he knew the hell of loneliness, with all the pain and injustice and the sin of the world literally bearing down upon him. That's why I think his deepest and most longing cry from the cross is "Father, why have you forsaken me." He knew the logic and reasoning and had studied the Scripture to understand what this moment was all about. Yet he had not experienced the depth of loneliness that he was now experiencing.

And that's why Jesus can relate to you and me when we go through those hellish lonely moments and seasons, where we feel no one else understands, no one else has the same pain, the same injustice, the same relational hurt. Jesus knows. And through his loneliness, we have a way to be lonely no more. We can choose loneliness. We can isolate ourselves in our sins. But we do have a Saviour and we do not have to take the weight of the world

upon ourselves. All we have to do is take today, and be open and honest with the Lord and with each other, and ask for help and for someone to listen. To let others bear our load, when it becomes too much for us. This was the incredible courage of Jesus to face the loneliness of the sacrifice of himself.

We are not the Messiah. He is. We simply need to continually give ourselves to Him and His ways, and to one another. What makes Good Friday good is the fact that we can know this Jesus, and we can know other human beings. We can help each other. We can make it through the worst and the best life has to offer us.

At the cross, Jesus was focused on his mission. At the cross, we are reminded that we too have a mission in this day and age and in this city. There are so many lonely and hurting, who need the Lord and they need us. So let us continue to become aware of our mission here, and to be able to express, day by day and moment by moment.

Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all. *–Isaac Watts*

Let us pray.