

St. David's Presbyterian Church  
St. John's, NL  
"The Crosshairs of the Cross"  
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Good Friday

A crosshair is a fine wire at the focus of an optical instrument for use in measurement. Crosshairs are used in microscopes to see the very small matters of life. Crosshairs are used in some telescopes to see the very large items of outer space. Crosshairs are also used for a bull's eye, which has nothing to do with bulls, really. It is a targeting mechanism for submariners, for hunters, for a prize, for food, for defense.

A crosshair brings a focus to the fore. So I was thinking about what the crosshairs of the Cross might be. Since the Cross is a vertical line and a horizontal line intersecting at right angles, we have a symbol that brings us to a central intersection of life, of history. The Cross is meant to be the center of all our lives. That's why Jesus said, "Take up your cross and follow me."

But he also knows that he will do something on the cross that we cannot do for ourselves. He will take the penalty of our sins on himself, so that we can stand before God at the judgment seat and say, "Jesus died for my sins. He was found guilty, that I might go free. I have life because He gave his for mine." That is our key, if you will, into heaven.

This is certainly one focus, one set of crosshairs for the cross. It is not the only one.

The cross also brings us back to the first Good Friday where John lets us look at every group and every individual who is confronted with Jesus' on his last of earthly ministry. They had a choice in what they did to Jesus. They chose to respond to him in faith or its opposite.

First, there is Judas who was one of the twelve closest followers of Jesus. He appears at the beginning of John's account in chapter 18, leading a group of soldiers, Roman soldiers and Temple guard police, to the place where Jesus is. Judas' purpose is to betray Jesus, as Scripture said someone would do. At this point in Judas' life we don't know how he feels, later he would feel great remorse and suicidal impulses, which he would finally give into. Judas is compared and contrasted with Peter, who also denied his

relationship with Jesus, not once but several times, who turned his back on his Lord. The only difference was that Peter would come back to Jesus and be reinstated, while Judas chose a permanent route away from the Lord.

These encounters are meant to warn us. We know if we too harbour such feelings and desires, such rebellion against God that turn us completely from God's ways, and we are warned to once again open ourselves to Jesus while we can.

The groups in the crucifixion account range from mild opposition to murderous intent, when it comes to Jesus. The group of Roman soldiers and Temple guards apparently were so taken with Jesus that they fell over in his presence, when he uttered the divine form of the name of God, "I am," as he did much early in John 8:58, "before Abraham was, I am." "I am that I am" was the name Moses received from God as God's name in Exodus. John notes the group of soldiers trying to put Jesus, God the Son, under arrest, are clearly out of their league. They simply fall over, bowled over by the divine power.

Other groups do not have the same response to Jesus. The group of priests who try Jesus at night try to make charges stick, but their testimonies do not match up, according to the various gospels. In other gospels they have Jesus admitting to being the Son of God, the Messiah. In John, Jesus only tells them that he always taught openly. The group of priests agrees to take Jesus to Pilate, the Roman governor to ask for the death penalty.

Then John takes us inside the building and outside the building with Pilate. There are many private conversations. Pilate seems open sometimes and closed other times. His wife warns him about having anything to do with Jesus in Mark, because she suffered in dreams. Pilate asks if Jesus is a king. He admits that he is, but not the kind of king Pilate thinks. He appeals to Pilate to listen to truth. But Pilate has been a politician too long and no longer knows what truth is.

Pilate does know how to work a crowd. He thinks they will surely choose to let a beloved rabbi/teacher go rather than a known murderer and terrorist. Pilate is wrong. The next group in the story is the crowd. And the crowd wants a crucifixion. Pilate does not agree with this. But rather sends Jesus for the hated forty minus one torturing by whips with pieces of glass and metal. He barely survives this. And even though the crowd gets to see Jesus

(*ecce homo*= “behold the man”) in such a violently abused way, the crowd still wants him tortured to death on a cross.

The cross was the billboard for those walking along the path to look up and see a wretched slave who had been tortured to death for a horrific crime, so as to say, “Don’t do what he did, or you will wind up like him.”

Pilate has his crime as “King of the Jews” in all the languages anyone who was literate could read. He gives into the political argument that if you are a friend of this king, you cannot be a friend of the Emperor. Pilate is snookered by his politics just as Herod had been snookered by his lust and killed John the Baptist.

Many individuals besides Pilate had violent intent toward the Lord: the high priest (who had prophesied Jesus’ death instead of the nation of Israel’s), the guard who punched him, the Roman soldiers who whipped him, who spit on him, who put the crown of thorns on him, and the robe.

The 12 minus one disciples had run away. Only John and the three Marys were there at the foot of the cross and some of the other women. The centurion knew after Jesus died at the foot of the cross as well.

And so we come to the foot of the cross. (go there) Here we are asked, “What do you see here?” Someone caught in a series of bad luck incidents? Someone who went against the authorities too many times? Someone who didn’t know how to get himself out of a terrible predicament?

No, Jesus gave himself to this. God surrendered himself to the murderous intent of his people. Could we ever have even imagined such a thing, where God becomes human, comes to his people, and they choose to have him tortured to death? It seems almost too vile to believe. Yet if ever evil could be reversed, this is the superlative event of such. An innocent man tortured to death becomes the ultimate sacrifice that provides a way for relationship with all who would receive it.

So here we are. We close eyes and can imagine, a tiny bit of what went on nearly 2000 years ago. John doesn’t record the wind and the earthquake and so much life released that people were walking around who had been dead, not zombies, fully alive. But we can feel the wind on our faces and know the power of that day. Every time we come to the Table of our Lord, we

come again to the foot of the Cross. And I make it a point to picture every time I take a bit of bread and a sip of juice, being there at the place of the Skull, near those crosses, saying "yes" to Jesus and Jesus' way in my life. I hope you can too. Take the time to imagine what Jesus did for you every time you come to his table.

And one more suggestion, put on Jesus the Lamb of God all that stands between you and God. Put to death the rebellion against God, the apathy against God's ways and truth, the violence and self-centeredness, whatever needs to die, place that on the Cross today. That's just one of the crosshairs of the cross.

There are many. Let us open to all that Jesus wants to do with us at the foot of the cross.

Let us pray.