Worship

April 15, 2022

*Good Friday*

**Invitation Hymn:** #230 “Go to dark Gethsemane”

**Call to worship:** Isaiah 53: 1-9, 12c

**Unison prayers:**

**We come to the foot of your cross**

**and bow with the disciples, Lord Jesus.**

**We ponder the mystery of your life and death with Mary.**

**We proclaim the truth of who you are**

**with those who witnessed your love poured out for us.**

**We come to you this day because you first came to us.**

**We come to show our love for you because you first loved us.**

**We come to serve you because you first served us.**

**We come to worship you**

**with the Father and the Holy Spirit,**

**one God, now and always.**

**Merciful God,**

**we confess that we have sinned against you**

**in thought, word, and deed.**

**We have not loved you**

**with our whole heart and mind and strength;**

**we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.**

**In your mercy forgive what we have been,**

**amend what we are,**

**and direct what we shall be,**

**so that we may delight in your will**

**and walk in your ways,**

**to the glory of your holy name.**

**Amen.**

**Assurance of God’s grace**: John 3:14-17

Accept the irrational grace of God,

and be at peace with God,

at peace with one another,

and at peace with yourself.

And give thanks to the Lord,

for He is good;

His love endures forever.

**Hymn:** #206 “Jesus, remember me” (sung 3x)

**Reading:** Luke 22:66-23:49 ( )

**Hymn:** #238 “Beneath the cross of Jesus

**Sermon:**

The necessity of the cross

**Me:** I don’t know if human rationalization will ever adequately explain the events of Good Friday.

**We:** Human perception struggles with the concept of an innocent person dying for the guilty through a miscarriage of justice perpetrated by the ones for whom he was dying.

We struggle as well with the concept of guilty people being declared innocent, because someone else endured their punishment.

We struggle with irrational grace.

As we read the story of Jesus’ arrest (by the efforts of a friend who sold him out), the trial against him, and his sentence, we read the story of a massive miscarriage of justice.

The elders, chief priests, and scribes felt threatened by Jesus. They saw him as a false teacher, perhaps a charlatan, who, by claiming to be the Son of God, was blaspheming. This was an offence punishable by death so they sought that verdict in order to rid themselves of him. Except, although under the law of Moses, blasphemy was punishable with death, under the Roman authority, the Jews were not allowed to administer execution. So, because they couldn’t eliminate him on straightforward religious grounds, they set about trying to get Jesus convicted on charges of treason, which Rome would be sure to punish by execution!

The charges they laid against him were false. He did not forbid people paying taxes! In fact, in chapter 20 he famously told those who were trying to entrap him that they ought to “give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s and to God the things that are God’s.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

The trial that ensued was a failed attempt by two levels of judicial systems to pass the buck. Pilate was the governor of all of Judea, Herod was the tetrarch of Galilee. When Pilate heard that Jesus was a Galilean, and that Herod happened to be in the city at the time, he turned Jesus’ case over to Herod. When Herod couldn’t build a case against him, he ordered Jesus mocked and sent him back to Pilate! Neither Pilate nor Herod could peace together the accusations in a way that would merit the death penalty.

Finally, it fell to Pilate to bring the proceedings to a close. Although Pilate was not a man to be praised for his morals nor ethics, in this instance he wanted to declare Jesus innocent. However, caving to the pressure of the crowd, he sentenced Jesus to death by crucifixion.

Betrayed by a friend, falsely accused by the elders, mocked by the politicians, and condemned without cause.

None of this ought to have happened.

An innocent man was executed because of fear and jealousy.

From our limited human sense of justice, this was a travesty.

Except that, if it hadn’t happened, there would be no salvation. If it hadn’t happened, there would be no reconciliation with the Living God in fellowship with whom is peace beyond our understanding.

**God:** The prophet Isaiah wrote four poems called the “Servant Songs” in which he described the character and ministry of the servant in whom God delights, who bears within him the Spirit of the Father, and who will “bring forth justice to the nations.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Our Call to Worship was taken from the fourth Servant Song (Isaiah 53) in which the prophet describes how the servant will fulfill this mission by absorbing the iniquities, infirmities, and punishments of Israel. This he did willingly and silently even though it was “by a perversion of justice he was taken away.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

While the servant “bore the sin of many”, it is “by his bruises that we are healed.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

As the church, over time, reflected on the events of Good Friday: the perversion of justice that was Jesus’ trial, the silence with which Jesus answered Herod, and the effects of His sacrificial death, they connected the dots between Isaiah’s suffering servant and the Messiah.

By the cross, Jesus assumed the guilt and paid the penalty of sin.

By the cross, Jesus took our place, faced the devil on our behalf, and absorbed our wounds into himself.

In 2nd Corinthians 5, the apostle Paul wrote that:

…in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, **not counting their trespasses against them**,…For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.[[5]](#footnote-5)

On the cross, Jesus made the great exchange: he took our sin and imparted to us his righteousness. In that we can be reconciled with our heavenly Father and enjoy the paradise of communion with Christ by the Spirit.

Jesus shouldn’t have died, yet, it was a miscarriage of justice that, for us and for our salvation, had to happen.

What wondrous love is this,

that caused the Lord of bliss

to lay aside his crown for my soul, for my soul,

to lay aside his crown for my soul.[[6]](#footnote-6)

**We:** The curtain of the temple is torn.

We can enter the holy presence of God and God leaves His throne to surround us with His steadfast love in the mystery of the Holy Spirit. There is now nothing that can separate us from the love of the heavenly Father in Christ.

Which is why we continue to preach the cross.

*The cross is a symbol of irrational grace*. By it, the one who knew no sin became Sin incarnate so that we, who know sin well, would become the very righteousness of God.

*The cross is a reminder that we are not yet in the renewed heavens and renewed earth*. Injustice continues, illness continues to threaten our well-being, anxieties continue to threaten our sense of peace, evil continues to try and gain the upper hand. The cross is a reminder that it is only by the grace of God and the mercies of His strength and His wisdom, that we can face our struggles – whether they are internal to ourselves, or in our family, or the stress of living in a world where so much is going wrong – and face those situations with faith, hope, and love.

*The cross is the Gate of Righteousness*. We might not ever understand nor like the explanations of why Jesus had to die, but the affect is that we can live our own tumultuous existence with a sense of hope, surrounded by the steadfast love of the Father as new creatures in Christ.

*The cross is a symbol of hope*. Not an ignorant hope that assumes there ought to be no suffering because the kingdom of heaven has come near; rather, a realistic hope that affirms God’s irrational grace is sufficient to help us endure with the fortitude, faith, hope, and love of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

*The cross is the symbol of the kingdom of heaven.* A government whose key policy is irrational grace manifesting in the forgiveness of sin and administered by the King who was crucified for us, in our place, and on our behalf.

As Jesus hung on his cross between two other criminals, one of them turned to him, recognized that Jesus is the King of kings, and asked to be remembered in the holy courts. And Jesus declared him innocent and invited him into the paradise of his all-encompassing love.

At that moment, Jesus’ declaration was not unreasonable because at that moment the criminal *was* innocent. Jesus took his guilt upon himself and declared the criminal innocent. He did so for the other criminal as well. God forgave them both! The difference is that the one recognized what Jesus was doing and accepted his grace as irrational as it might have seemed, and thus could enjoy the blessings His love, the other did not and thus could not.

What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul!

What wondrous love is this, O my soul!

What wondrous love is this,

that caused the Lord of bliss

to lay aside his crown for my soul, for my soul,

to lay aside his crown for my soul.

**Solo:** “The Calvary Road” (Haldor Lillenas, sung by Judy Armstrong)

**Prayers of thanksgiving and intercession:**

*(The response to “Lord, in your mercy,” is* ***“Hear our prayer”****.)*

O God of Peace,

Within our lives and relationships,

in our communities and this world,

we face so much conflict and antagonism.

Today we pray for all places where conflict and cruelty appear to win the day;

for countries where violence cuts down people and war threatens;

and for every relationship marked by abuse and harm.

*Keep silence for ten seconds.*

Loving God, give us peace in our time.

Lord, in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

O God of Hope,

These days the world seems confusing and bleak in many places,

so we ask that you pierce the darkness with hope and renewed vision.

We give you thanks for lessons learned, for changes of heart,

for new discoveries made and hope restored.

As we mark Jesus’ death this day,

we pray for those who are ill and dying,

for those who are bereaved or feel any burden of loss.

*Keep silence for ten seconds.*

Renew our trust in your resurrecting love.

We give you thanks for those who have died and abide with you;

keep us united with them and bring us together with you at the last.

Loving God, give us hope in our time.

Lord, in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

O Spirit of God,

We pray for the Church of Christ here and throughout the world:

unite it in witness and service.

Wherever it is in error or compromised by indifference or discrimination,

restore its vigor and grace.

Wherever the pandemic has taken its toll on worship life

or energy for ministry and mission is lagging,

renew its heart for faithfulness and fellowship.

*Keep silence for ten seconds.*

Nurture our calling to unique ministries wherever we serve.

Loving God, give us courage in our time.

Lord, in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

O Creator of Joy,

We thank you for our moments of joy and celebration,

for pleasure given and received,

for times of quiet reflection and new understanding.

We remember before you those who feel lonely or bitter,

and those who are walking through any kind of dark valley.

*Keep silence for ten seconds.*

Be their light and their warmth.

Melt our hearts to love anyone in difficulty more deeply.

Loving God, give us joy in our time.

Lord, in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

O Love from heaven to earth come down,

You call us to live in communion with you and one another.

We remember before you our families, whether we are close or estranged,

and our friends, whether nearby or far away.

*Keep silence for ten seconds.*

Bless all the relationships that sustain us and bring your love close by.

Loving God, give us love in our times.

Lord, in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

Hear us as we pray the words Jesus taught us:

**The Lord’s Prayer**

**Hymn:** #242 “What wondrous love is this”

**God’s Blessing**

1. Luke 20:20-25. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Isaiah 42:1 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Isaiah 53:8 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Isaiah 53:12, 5 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 2 Corinthians 5:19-21. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. “What wondrous love is this” vs. 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)