

Good Friday Sermon 2022

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It's easy to get lost in the story of Jesus' final day. It's one of the longest stories in the whole bible. The two full chapters of John that we just heard then cover a less than twenty four hour period. It's night on Thursday when Jesus goes into the garden to pray with his disciples. The reading ends near sundown on Friday afternoon.

If you're a Harry Potter fan, or even if you've just seen the movies, it's like how long the last day of the story is. Harry, Heromine, and Ron wake up in Shell Cottage and at the end of this very, very long day they are at Hogwarts with Voldemort dead.

The passion from John reading is like this. It's all one very long day. And we stop the story with Jesus being carried into the tomb. We don't keep reading to see what happens. We know. We all know. But we stop here.

Whether this is the first time hearing the story or your fiftieth time hearing it, it's easy to get lost. Jesus is where now? Judas did what? Peter said what? Where are the rest of the disciples?

The experience of feeling lost in the story is probably a very faithful way to experience the story. Afterall, as the events unfolded in real time over 2,000 years ago, none of the disciples grasped how it was all going to happen. They all probably felt lost too.

Though Jesus had predicted his death and resurrection to them several times, the chaos, fear, the unrelenting pace of the day, and their all consuming grief kept them from putting the pieces of the puzzle together. These same things can keep us from seeing God at work in our own lives or from being able to understand God's words and promises.

When I look back over the past two years, I can remember well times of chaos, times of fear, times when the pace of life was unrelenting, and far too many moments of all consuming grief. I imagine you can too.

Because of this, finding my place in the story of Good Friday has been hard for me this year. I'm terrible at rock climbing, but whenever I try it, I always stand at the bottom just staring up at the wall. I don't know where to start. I don't know where my in is. This was me before this passage of scripture.

But just this past week, I heard a prayer that really spoke to my heart and also grounded me in the story of the passion. It offered distinct and succinct holds for the story. Holds like the colorful pieces of a rock climbing wall. When I heard these phrases, I had visceral reaction, like, ah, this is it. Like, yes, here we go. I want to share them with you and then add just several more of my own.

This particular line from the prayer reads: When we betray like Judas, deny like Peter, and scatter like the disciples, forgive our frailties.

Betray. Deny. Scatter. These verbs are direct and clear.

I'll add, when we cry like the crowds and judge like Pilate. Because it's not just the ones who are on Jesus' side who experience and encounter God.

Betray. Deny. Cry. Judge. Scatter. Forgive our frailties.

Judas betrayed Jesus into the hands of the soldiers. Peter denied knowing Jesus when directly asked. The crowds cried for his death. Pilate judged based on the cry of the crowd, rather than the words of Jesus. The disciples scattered away from Jesus and went to hide where they thought it would be safe.

There are times when we join in these actions too. We do these things to Jesus and to the people and creation that Jesus loves so dearly. We betray, deny, cry for injustice, judge falsely, and scatter instead standing up for love. In these ways we find ourselves in the story of Good Friday. And just as Jesus forgave Judas, Peter, the crowds, Pilate, and the disciples, Jesus forgives us too.

Yet it seems to me there are another set of verbs that describe faithful recognitions of Jesus and what is happening in this story too. So rather than praying for forgiveness, let's pray for empowerment to act in these ways.

May we adopt like Mary, carry like Joseph, and tend like Nicommedus.

Mary and the beloved disciple adopt one another to answer Jesus' final request for his mother to be protected. Joseph of Arimathea took Jesus' body from the cross to an empty tomb.

Nicommedus, who seems to only come to Jesus under the cover of shadows, shows up again to prepare Jesus' body for burial.

There are times when we join in these actions as well. We do these things to Jesus and to the people and creation that Jesus loves so dearly. We adopt those in need of protection and care. We carry those cannot carry themselves. We tend each other's wounds, broken hearts, and grief with compassion. The Spirit moving in us just as Jesus moved in Mary, Joseph, and Nicommedus.

If you have found a hold in this story this day, I pray that you trust in God's forgiveness of you and in the way that God shows love to the world through you. If you still feel lost, I pray that you also trust God's forgiveness of you and that God's love is shared to the world through you. Being lost is a very faithful and valid Christian experience.

As we enter into this period of waiting, mediating, and preparing for the feasts to come, let us hold onto this forgiveness and love. Knowing that Jesus did all he did on Good Friday so that we might not be lost forever. Jesus is holding us fast. Amen.