

A SERMON BY THE REVEREND ELIZABETH F. KEELER

Good Friday



30 March 2018

Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9

John 18:1-19:42

Psalm 22

All of our attention - our worship, our music, our prayers, our hearts and minds, all the focus we can muster - is squarely in one place today: the Cross. On this day we profess that something significant happened on a wooden cross, and, whatever that was, or is, we call it good.

I'm sure the irony of the designation "good" has struck you, as it has me. And so right up front let's acknowledge that if today is just a day we reenact the execution of Jesus, well that's not really good. Or even if today has become a placeholder for all the suffering, the sinfulness, the injustice, the unexplainable brokenness in the world and of humanity, well, it still makes no sense to speak of this day as good. After all, we don't give other tragic anniversaries the tag line "good". We certainly haven't given September 11, 2001 the designation good. And I imagine you don't call anniversaries of the tragedies in your own lives good. No, we clearly don't call Good Friday good because Jesus was brutally executed on this day and so we remember all bad things that have ever happened.

We must also acknowledge that good does not mean easy or magical or even mysterious or holy. The day is not called good simply because we can't really explain or understand what happened on the Cross. That's not the case because the goodness of Good Friday in no way eliminates the reality of sin, and suffering, and death. We know all too well that tragedy still exists in the world - it always has and it always will and there's no magic that eliminates those experiences for us. Life doesn't work that way; God doesn't work that way.

And so somehow, somehow we must wrestle our hearts and minds to an awareness that the term "good" encompasses the entirety of what happened on the Cross, God's participation in that, and what it means for all humanity and for us individually - that's a tall order! And so now I'd like to shift our thinking about this day, just a bit, from simply *remembering what happened* to *living into what was accomplished*. I'll say that again, shifting from simply *remembering what happened* to *living into what was accomplished*.

Good Friday - good in the sense that something mind-blowingly significant was and is accomplished - something eternal, that lasts forever, something that is permanent, that no one can take away from us, from you or from me or from the world. An accomplishment that's a game changer that means everything, everywhere is different. An accomplishment that saves us, from ourselves and from one another. Something accomplished that in some way, makes everything good, once and for all and forever.

What is accomplished on the Cross is so good in fact that it is, at the same time, both universal and particular. Said another way, the accomplishment on the cross is so powerful that it transforms the whole of creation and each of our individual lives, yours and mine. Let me expound on this idea of universal and particular accomplishment using a very specific example.

One of the most human and moving moments in the Passion, the story of the Cross, is the passage where, as he is dying, Jesus gives his mother into the care of his Beloved Disciple. These are among the last words Jesus utters. Here they are from John's Gospel: "When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved beside her, he said to his mother, *Woman here is your son*. Then he said to the disciple, *here is your mother*."

With these simple phrases Jesus lovingly provides for his mother, ensuring she's cared for by pairing her with the disciple whom he loved and trusted. As the mother of sons, this is the most tender and personal part of the Cross story for me. It captures the love that parents and children share and the searing pain of losing one another. The story becomes individual and deeply personal as we realize what occurs on the cross truly involves a real son, mother, loyal friend, tragic death, courage and love (it could be any of our stories.)

And notice, just as the principalities believed they were tearing his family apart and dismantling his power, Jesus is accomplishing wholeness, quietly and deliberately putting his family back together. He is establishing relationship and community and continuity at the exact moment his enemies imagine his influence is ending.

But I would offer that Jesus also had something much greater in mind with this, one of his final acts, and so his accomplishment is also universal. You see the family Jesus is knitting together from the Cross also embodies something comprehensive and far-reaching. Tradition suggests that Mary, the mother of Jesus, represents the Jewish community that gave birth to Jesus. In a real sense she is nothing less than Israel, to whom God has now fulfilled his promise. She is the embodiment of tradition, the best of that tradition, she is the Old Covenant.

The disciple whom Jesus loved represents the whole company of new believers, those who responded to Jesus' ministry, those who believed in his teachings and message and followed him faithfully. The Beloved Disciple is the embodiment of the New Covenant. From the Cross Jesus guides the coming together of these two traditions and a realization that each group needs the other and that out of their relationship something very significant will emerge...

a new kind of community.

"He said to his mother, *Woman, here is your son*, and he said to the disciple, *here is your mother!*" On the Cross Jesus makes provision for, and thus accomplishes, the continuation and renewal of the community of the faithful. And to take this a bit further... what came out of that union between Jesus' mother and his beloved disciple is none other than... the Church.

We usually locate the founding of the Church at Pentecost but perhaps, just perhaps, the seeds of the Church are actually scattered here, with these words from the Cross, forged from the relationship

between the two souls who loved Jesus so mightily that they were brave enough, and loyal enough, and good enough to stand by and watch him die. Surely there is something magnificently good in that.

This final scene at the foot of the Cross, with its ability to pierce our hearts with timeless echoes of love and loss, future possibilities of relationship and Church, is just one example of how we might understand this day in all of its powerful dimensions. Teilhard de Chardin offered this: “Christians are not called to swoon in the shadow of the Cross, but to climb to it’s light.” On this good night and in the days to come may our loss be accompanied by light, our grief transformed by God’s goodness, and our lives and this world somehow be made whole by Jesus Christ’s accomplishment upon the Cross.

Amen.



CHRIST CHURCH GEORGETOWN

31st and O Streets, NW
Washington, DC 20007 | 202.333.6677
www.christchurchgeorgetown.org
info@christchurchgeorgetown.org

The Rev. Timothy A. R. Cole, Rector
The Rev. Elizabeth F. Keeler, Asst. to the Rector
The Rev. Elizabeth B. Gardner, Asst. to the Rector
The Rev. Nicholas J. Evancho, Deacon & Seminarian