

“The Church is Good Friday.”

Poet Ann Weems writes ---

“The church is Good Friday.  
 Darkness burnt into blackness,  
 abysmal absence of anything good.  
 We acknowledge that death is real  
 and we tremble for a world that would kill its God.  
 Our feet stand in quicksand;  
 our voices echo sterile silence.  
 We huddle together to meet the dark and the death,  
 forgetting what was taught us,  
 forgetting that somewhere  
 a seed is sprouting,  
 somewhere  
 a child is growing.  
 All we see is Christ crucified.”

The church **IS** Good Friday.

And today is **THE** day of the church.

This is the day that Jesus came for ---- the cross is precisely what Jesus came for.

It's not by mistake that the most recognizable symbol of our faith is the cross.

The cross is why Jesus came --- the cross is why God stepped down into His creation and took human form.

And there are many different perspectives on the cross.

Many different ways of trying to explain the cross and experience the cross.

We just heard 6 different perspectives from scripture.

We heard from ---- Judas ---- Simon ---- a soldier ----- Mary ---- a thief ---- and we heard from a centurion --- and of course there are many other

perspectives as well --- Pilate --- the crowd --- the Sanhedrin --- chief priests  
 ----- various disciples --- and so on.

And all of them have something to say and offer --- as to what happened that  
 day ---- hoe they experienced it --- perhaps even how God spoke to them.

And they all have something to say precisely because the cross is ultimately  
 far beyond our understanding.

It is divine and cosmic --- and so far reaching and deep ---- that its full  
 meaning is always just a little beyond our reach --- it is not something we  
 apprehend --- it is something we behold.

And yet we gather ---- on this the most powerful ---- and profound --- and  
 mysteriously deep and rewarding of days ---- to ponder the cross --- to  
 reflect on it --- to behold it.

The cross is so meaning making --- and so paradoxical symbol --- that all we  
 can do at the deepest level is behold it ---- gathering at the foot of it.

And we gather less to consider what was done to God ----and more to  
 consider what God has done through it.

We just heard a bit about what people thought and felt and how they reacted  
 --- Judas ---- Simon ---- a soldiers ----- Mary ---- a thief ---- and a centurion.

And in a short bit --- we will shortly say what we believe as Christians -----  
 the Apostles' Creed --- a brief and powerful summary of our faith.

And then we will also commune together.

Share in the Lord's Supper together.

And the truth is ----- the supper is the very heart of our service today.

And it's the heart of our service precisely because it is all about what God  
 has done --- God's initiative --- God's action ---- God's saving action ---- in  
 Christ ---- on the cross.

On Palm Sunday --- the waving palm branches ---- and singing and shouting --- praising the king as He entered into Jerusalem on a donkey --- laying down cloaks and so on --- were a big part of the day ----- but they weren't what the day was fundamentally about ---- they weren't the heart of the day.

They were human responses to the day --- but the day was fundamentally all about God's act --- God's initiative ----- God coming into Jerusalem to present Himself --- to sacrifice Himself ---- to suffer Himself --- acting on our behalf --- doing what we couldn't do --- doing what only He could do.

And so the ground grumbled and shook on Palm Sunday as Jesus --- as God presented Himself --- entering into Jerusalem.

Today it is very similar.

Today ---- just like Palm Sunday we often get caught up in what is secondary ---- our response --- how we feel ----- how we want to express ourselves --- what's happening with us ----- when really ---- it is all about God and what He has done.

The crucifixion --- the beating and mocking and killing of Christ --- are human reactions and expressions in response to the majesty and power and beauty of God.

And so they ---- beating --- mocking --- killing --- are not fundamentally what today is all about.

Just as palm branches ---- shouts of hosanna --- and singing ---- and laying cloaks are secondary to what Palm Sunday is really all about.

So today ---- beating ---- mocking ---- brutality --- murder ----- are also secondary.

And they are secondary precisely because despite being driven by evil --- they are ultimately human expressions --- human executions --- and therefore secondary.

Today --- as indeed every worship service --- and every day in general ---- today is all about God --- and what He is doing.

Not our responses ---- not our thoughts --- not our self expressions --- or even our attempts at meaning making.

As Goethe --- the 18<sup>th</sup> century German said ---- “The highest cannot be spoken --- only acted.”

“The highest cannot be spoken --- only acted.”

Today --- Good Friday --- the cross --- is God acting.

The table --- is God acting.

God acted on the cross.

God definitively acted on the cross.

Something wasn't done to God ---- or enacted ---- thrust on God ----- no ----  
----- God initiated the cross.

God did something --- God accomplished something ---- God accomplished not just something but **THE** thing --- on the cross.

Reconciliation --- restoration ----re-prioritization ---- putting things back in their place ----- were accomplished on the cross.

The cross reminds us --- that our actions are secondary to God's.

The cross reminds us that God can do as God so chooses ----- and there is absolutely nothing that we can do to change this on a fundamental and foundational level.

As Ann Weems said --- “The church is Good Friday.”

And as she also said --- “All we see is Christ crucified.”

That's what we see today --- Christ crucified --- God acting.

In a very real sense all of the violence --- beatings --- mocking ----- humiliating --- murdering --- is secondary ---- necessary --- but secondary.

What is primary --- is the action of God --- not of man --- Romans --- Pilate -  
 ---- nor the Sanhedrin --- the chief priests ---- nor the crowds ---- but God.

That's what makes today so important and so glorious and so ..... ----- so  
 beyond words.

“The highest cannot be spoken --- only acted.”

What happens today envelopes us --- surrounds us ----- wraps itself around  
 us ---- and cradles us in the palm of its hand.

A few ways of expressing God acting today ----

----- “He is stretched out upon a cross --- who by his words stretched  
 out the heavens.”

----- “He is crowned with thorns --- who has crowned the earth with  
 flowers.”

----- They enclose him in a tomb whom creation cannot contain.”  
 (Amphilochius 4<sup>th</sup> century Bishop of Iconium)

----- “English speaking Christians call this day Good.  
 It is a day --- not of unmitigated mourning --- as if Jesus were dead --- dead -  
 -- dead --- but of profound contemplation of the mystery that ---- from the  
 cross of death --- God grants the world new life.  
 The waters of baptism flow from the cross --- and our gathering is contained  
 by Christ's crown of thorns.  
 Held together in the passion of Christ ---- we hold out our hands in prayer  
 for all the world.”

----- “God has overcome the world's darkness ----- and what  
 happened on a hillside outside Jerusalem has made all the difference.” ---  
 Samuel T. Lloyd III

----- “Never were those arms open so wide as they were on the  
 Roman cross.  
 One arm extending back into history and the other reaching into the future.  
 An embrace of forgiveness offered for anyone who'll come.  
 A hen gathering her chicks.

A father receiving his own.  
 A redeemer redeeming the world.  
 No wonder they call him the Saviour.” ---- Max Lucado.

And then these words ----- also by Max Lucado ---

Take me Home:

“Were it a war ---- this would be the aftermath.  
 Were it a symphony ---- this would be the second between the final note and  
 the first applause.  
 Were it a journey --- this would be the sight of home.  
 Were it a storm --- this would be the sun, piercing the clouds.  
 But it wasn't. It was a Messiah. And this was a sigh of joy.

“Father!”  
 the voice that called forth from the dead,  
 the voice that taught the willing,  
 the voice that screamed at God,  
 now says, “Father!”  
 “Father.”

The two are again one.  
 The abandoned is now found.  
 The schism is now bridged.

“Father.” He smiles weakly. “It's over.”  
 Satan's vultures have been scattered.  
 Hell's demons have been jailed.  
 Death has been damned.  
 The sun is out ---- The Son is out.  
 It's over.  
 An angel sighs. A star wipes away a tear.

“Take me home.”  
 Yes, take him home.  
 Take this prince to his king  
 Take this son to his father  
 Take this pilgrim to his home  
 (He deserves a rest.)

“Take me home.”

Come ten thousand angels! Come and take this wounded troubadour to  
the cradle of his Father’s arms!

Farewell manger’s infant  
Bless You holy ambassador  
Go home death slayer  
Rest well sweet soldier

The battle is over.”

God has acted.

Christ has been crucified.

Life returns to the way God first intended it to be ---- abundant and eternal.

The bond between the creator and His creatures --- His beloved --- has been  
repaired.

The Church is Good Friday.

The Church is God acting.

This is God’s day.

And this is God’s day --- God’s way.

This day will never have to happen again.

This is indeed God’s day --- God’s way.

Amen.