



Good Friday
Light of Christ Anglican Church
The Rev. Mike Moffitt
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The Lord Did Provide

Text: [John 19:1-37](#)

Today we have gathered together to remember the darkest day in human history. This was the day when those who called themselves the “children of God” conspired with Satan to humiliate, torture and put to death the Son of God. Often people ask why this day would be called Good Friday when something so dark and terrible happened. We come into the church and find the altar stripped, and usually the cross is draped in black symbolizing the hopelessness felt by the disciples of Jesus.

There is no Eucharist because today is not meant to be a celebration but a remembrance of that day long ago when our Savior suffered and died on our behalf. At that time the cross was not the symbol of victory but of defeat in the most humiliating way. The prophets foretold all that the Messiah would go through on behalf of sinners. One of the most often quoted is from Isaiah 53:3-6 which we read on Palm Sunday,

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely, he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that

brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

When we read Old Testament stories like [Genesis 22:1–18](#) we see through Abraham a type and foreshadowing of what God would do through his only Son that He loved. Throughout the story of Abraham from [Genesis 11:31 to 22:19](#) it is clear that God was the initiator of their relationship, and it was God who graciously committed himself to Abraham.

But in our story tonight God tests Abraham's obedience. From the beginning of [chapter 22](#) it's quite easy for us to be alarmed at God's command to Abraham to present his son Isaac, whom he loved, as a burnt offering to the Lord. Human sacrifice was abhorrent and a practice of pagan idol worship. Even though the law of God had not yet been established, there was a law written upon the hearts of men, and this command seemed impossible to reconcile. I have commented before that I can't help but wonder about the difficulty of doing such a thing that seemed to contradict the promise that God had made to Abraham about all the nations of the earth being blessed through his seed.

As I was preparing for this message I was reminded of the time when God made it very clear to me the path that Teresa and I were to pursue. Nothing about it made any sense on any level. I sought out friends who are mature Christians and explained what I felt (actually knew) God to be saying. Everyone was shocked and advised me to move carefully and make certain that it was God speaking. One pastor friend said, "make sure what you are feeling is of God and not just a case of undigested beef." Teresa was adamant that what I was doing was crazy and God was definitely not in it.

I knew that I had no choice but to follow the leading of God, and we did. It was not only a difficult move, but it brought with it a level of stress that made me question whether or not I had heard from God. As it ended up it was clearly of God, and we benefitted from our obedience. It deepened our ability to trust God in whatever situation we found ourselves.

However, it was nothing in comparison to what God was commanding Abraham to do.

The story moves from God's command in verse 2 to verse 3 with Abraham moving in obedience to the command. I've always imagined what was going through Abraham's mind in the period between the command of God and Abraham moving to accomplish what God demanded. I assume that he wrestled all night with what God asked of him, and I imagine that he questioned God, "what about the promise that through Isaac all the nations will be blessed? What about Sarah? What am I going to tell her?" I bet that God did not answer him. There was nothing to say to Abraham. God had spoken clearly and in such a definitive way that obedience was Abraham's only option, unless like Adam and Eve he had chosen disobedience.

You know the story. Because of his fidelity, God assured Abraham that it would be through his son Isaac that all the promises of the covenant would be fulfilled. God himself providing the ram caught in the thicket by his horns was a type and shadow that points us to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who died for those in bondage to their sins and provided the only way to have life with God. In taking an oath to bless Abraham and all nations through him, God guaranteed the promise to Abraham's offspring. God tests his saints to prove the quality of their faith and obedience. He often does this through adversity and hardship, and Jesus was no different. Like

Abraham, Jesus, the Son of God was in his humanness tested. Hebrews 5:8–9,

Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him...

As the events of Jesus' crucifixion on Golgotha unfolds in each of the gospel accounts of the Passion, we can look back to Old Testament stories, the word of the prophets, and Messianic Psalms like [22](#) and [110](#) and remember that what happened that day was intentional. It all transpired because God knew what it would take for our sin to be atoned for and for us to be free from the curse of sin and death. Jesus knew the prophecies because as God he had placed them in the mouths of those who spoke them.

Sometimes it's difficult to feel somber on Good Friday because we know the story of what happened on the third day. This can feel like play-acting unless God enables us to see our sin for what it is. I haven't completely stopped sinning. Have you?

If you use the "Daily Office" in the *Book of Common Prayer*, whether it is Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, or Compline there is always the confession of sin in each liturgy. Every time we gather for worship we have the confession of sin. I doubt that I need to tell you why. I have been a sinner for over 67 years, and some of you have me beat. A good deal of my life I couldn't have cared less about that but when God saved me I was so grateful. I walked in darkness for a long time and Jesus paid the price for my sins, which were legion, and now I have been set free from the bondage of sin and death. Last night at the Maundy Thursday service we sang "Jesus Paid It All" by Elvina Hall in 1865. I love that song and thought it

must have been seen as very appropriate in such a very dark time in this nation's history. Listen to the words of verse 1 and the refrain again.

I hear the Savior say,
"Thy strength indeed is small;
Child of weakness, watch and pray,
Find in Me thine all in all."

Refrain:

Jesus paid it all, All to Him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow.

That song was written a long time ago, and my encounter with the saving power of Jesus has been a long time, too. But I have not forgotten about that overwhelming darkness and how often I felt so alone and without any real joy.

So as we focus on the lessons to be found on "Good Friday" I would like to suggest two.

The first was how Jesus was made to experience a darkness that I will never have to know because he took it upon himself. As we read in [Isaiah 53](#) and in the Gospel of [John 19:1-37](#) everyone turned away from him, even his disciples ran away out of fear for their lives. Those who had earlier welcomed him to Jerusalem as their king with shouts of "Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" now in front of Pontius Pilate joined with the religious leaders with shouts of "Crucify him, Crucify him!"

While Jesus hung on the cross the Synoptic Gospels record that those who were with Him were "the chief priests, with the scribes and elders", two

robbers crucified, one on Jesus' right and one on His left, and the Roman soldiers who saw to the details of the crucifixion. John's 19:25–27 records,

...but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home."

Most all commentators believe that Jesus was referring to John the disciple. Where were all the others?

Consider Isaiah 53:10, "**Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief...**", and Psalm 22:1–2,

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.

It was those very words that Jesus cried out on the cross at the moment when the Father turned away from him. In Matthew 27:46 we read,

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

This cry reflected the depth of Jesus' distress as he endured the pain of separation from His Father for the first time. Later the disciples would realize that Jesus was enduring the curse of God's judgment on sin—the full, furious and dreadful wrath of Almighty God. The darkness that he experienced was total and there was no hope that relief was coming from anywhere. He was made to experience the full wrath of God and the terror

and hopelessness of Hell where God's saving presence is completely absent.

You and I have no way of understanding a darkness that is so complete and so totally without hope. Jesus knowingly took this punishment upon himself so that we wouldn't have to. That is why the somberness of Good Friday is called for and also why it is called "good." By good, it is not an expression of our approval, but that this day is holy.

We often fail to consider the consequences of our sins or have a true understanding of how deep they can be embedded in our hearts. A great example of this darkness and the depth of human depravity is in John 19:31,

Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their (Jesus and the two robbers) legs might be broken and that they might be taken away."

The day of Jesus' crucifixion was the day that all the preparations for the Sabbath had to be done and this was not an ordinary Sabbath but the Passover Sabbath. According to the Jewish law if there were bodies left on crosses during this time it would defile the land. You'll notice that the Jews were willing to join forces with Rome to commit murder but then felt compelled to turn around and insist that the Jewish ceremonial law be enforced.

So, they requested that the legs be broken so death would come much quicker. Without the legs to hold up the body a person would literally suffocate because they could not take in enough air. They had gotten their way and Jesus was dead. Problem solved. When they came to Jesus to break his legs the guards realized that he was already dead and so they

pierced his side with a spear to make sure. John places this detail in the story as a way of showing that all these things happened according to the will of God and to dispel any rumor that Jesus was not actually dead.

Everything was going according to plan—but not the one set out by the Pharisees. This was the plan of God set down before the foundations of the earth.

Even seemingly minor details were fulfilled such as Psalm 34:20, *“He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken”* which fulfilled the requirements of Numbers 9:12 where the Passover Lamb was to be sacrificed but not one of his bones could be broken. Remember John the Baptist speaking through the Holy Spirit as he recognized Jesus in John 1:29, *“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”*

Now upon the cross the perfect sacrificial lamb had been slain. Our Epistle reading from Hebrews 10:5–7; 10–12,

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, “Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure.

Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’”

...And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God...

So, the first compelling reason that we should consider our sin on Good Friday is because Jesus loved us enough to take our punishment and

experience what we deserved. That is not something to take lightly or forget. Instead, it demands our reflection and recommitment to the loving obedience of God.

The second focus that I believe the Lord wants us to contemplate on Good Friday is the level of sorrow, guilt, self-loathing and darkness the disciples and the faithful women who had followed Jesus felt. Everything they had hoped for over the previous three years had been crushed as they watched in numbness the heavily damaged, lifeless body of Jesus placed in the tomb.

Years ago while going through a particularly difficult time in my life a friend gave me a copy of *The Long Dark Night of the Soul* by St. John of the Cross a 16th-century Carmelite priest and mystic. I looked at the title and thought to myself, “well this should cheer me up.” I found out that I didn’t need cheering up but to be reminded that I could not face my darkness alone. I loved one of the quotes from that little treasure,

the virtuous soul that is alone and without a master, is like a lone burning coal. It will grow colder rather than hotter. Those who fall alone remain alone in their fall, and they value their souls little since they entrust it to themselves alone.

I found such wisdom in that.

When the disciples found themselves in darkness and despair they must have felt there was nowhere or no one they could turn to. They were hiding because of their association with Jesus. He was gone and they were likely to be at the least thrown out of the synagogue, which was the social center of the Jewish life. Who could they turn to? Would they be arrested? What they needed was Jesus, but He was dead. They were utterly alone and without hope until...?

That's why Good Friday is so important. Without Jesus we have no hope both now and in the age to come. But with Him the darkness flees, and the Light of Christ dispels the darkness. Each of the Synoptic Gospels has the story of the disciples arguing about which of them was the greater disciple. What they had clearly not realized is that if you put them all together without the Holy Spirit or the power of the name of Jesus they would not come close to accomplishing what Jesus was going to ask them to do. All their expectations of the powerful kingdom where Jesus was King was completely dependent on Jesus being there to serve as king. Without Him they had nothing to offer. It was vitally important that they know that. At this point they had no idea of the resurrection but needed to have a few days to reflect on how helpless and alone they were without the Master.

The same is true of the Christian church today. We are nothing but a club without the power of the Holy Spirit and the power and authority of the name above every name, Jesus Christ. As we approach the celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus on Sunday take the time to carefully and prayerfully reflect on your absolute need of Him in every area of your life. Invite Him to speak to you about this over the next few days.

Let's pray.

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