

Good Friday Mark 15:33-39

The Crucifixion

The language in this passage is remarkably restrained. There is no attempt in it to create sympathy for Jesus. There is no attempt to incite hatred toward those responsible for the actual crucifixion itself. This is an event far too solemn for that sort of thing. The facts are stated and left to stand for themselves. No additional comment is offered.

In a passage where the language is so carefully chosen, the reader needs to go through it slowly and thoughtfully, so as not to miss what is being said. Jesus' enemies thought they had seen the end of him. But, according to Mark, nothing happened that should have surprised anyone who knew the Scriptures.

Unknown to both the friends and enemies of Jesus, in some mysterious way, the things they did and said had always been a part of God's eternal plan. It is a great mystery, one the church believes fulfilled God's purpose, in the events surrounding the death of Jesus.

On Thursday evening, in the darkness of an olive orchard, Jesus had asked for the support of his disciples. In particular, he had asked for the support of Peter, James and John while he went a little distance away. He went off to pray for relief from the necessity to drink from the cup of suffering he could see before him. They seemed to do as he had asked them, but were actually indifferent to his request.

They were tired from the events of the day, so they took the opportunity to get some sleep. This meant, that Jesus was left to agonize all alone. And while his closest friends were sleeping, his enemies were wide awake and were on the move. During the same evening, in the darkness, possibly near midnight, he was arrested by an armed mob.

His disciples, all of whom, including the inner three, had sworn loyalty to him until death if need be, fled for their lives from the armed mob. And he was left alone. In the courtyard of the High Priest, while he was being questioned, his senior disciple denied all knowledge of him. Jesus was deserted by the only disciple who had followed him that far.

Jesus was left to face an unknown future - alone. Later on, the religious leaders of his own people, accused him before a Roman official they all hated. While charges that were inconsistent with one another were shouted back and forth around him, he maintained a dignified silence. Finally, he was condemned to death on a cross by a man who, more than anything, feared public pressure.

As part of the pre-crucifixion routine, Jesus had been brutally beaten. It was a procedure that brought men to the edge of death, and sometimes death itself. It is quite likely he needed help to carry the cross-beam of his cross as the procession left the city for Golgotha. The man chosen to help him was called Simon, a native of Cyrene.

He must carry the cross-beam in the place of another man - Simon Peter of Galilee. We hardly need a reminder at this point that Simon Peter had pledged himself to die with Jesus, if that should have been necessary. Instead of denying himself, taking up the cross and following after his master, he denied his master. And so, another man, another Simon, must do under orders what Peter had offered to do voluntarily.

By the time the gospel was written, Peter had, in fact, been martyred in Rome. And without any doubt, he had ended up carrying his cross in every sense of the word. But, on the day of Jesus' crucifixion, when the disciples from Galilee ought to have done it, it was a native of Cyprus who carried the cross-beam.

The contrast between the pledges of a disciple and his actual performance in a time of crisis does not end with Peter. Earlier in the gospel, two of the disciples, James and John, asked for the chief places with Jesus when he came into his glory. They asked that when the great day came they might be seated, one at his right hand and one at his left. At the time of their request Jesus had warned them: "You don't know what you are asking."

And they certainly did not. When Jesus' royalty was demonstrated on the cross, he had other companions with him. In the place of James and John, his disciples, he had the fellowship of two criminals - one on his right and the other on his left. Just as Peter ought to have been carrying the cross, so the ambitious brothers ought to have been with him.

However, they had dreams of more comfortable places. They had dreams of a cup brimming over with the good life, and of a baptism into a different sort of society. And, like Peter, they were to follow Jesus later. In the meantime, the chief places on either side of him were taken by two men from the city jail - men who were crucified and put to death where they could be seen by the largest number of people. Their deaths were a warning to all who saw them that imperial power did not deal lightly with those who dared oppose it. People who were crucified were put to death in a location at eye-level with the traffic that passed by. The body of the victim was bent in an "S" shape to keep the feet from touching the ground. As he hung dying, the criminal was frequently subjected to the taunts and tortures of heartless passers-by who saw their complete helplessness.

In his dying, Jesus was despised and rejected by the passing crowd, by religious leaders and authorities, and by those who were put to death with him. The men on either side of him joined the passing parade of pathetic people in their outpouring of contempt and hostility toward him. In fact, according to Mark, unlike the other gospel writers, what they said was not fit

even to be recorded.

The gospel of Mark at this point has provided us with a poignant picture of Jesus; betrayed by a man he had called and trusted, deserted by the rest of his disciples, falsely accused by his own people, and ridiculed by complete strangers. And now, as it was in the Garden of Gethsemane, once again he was in darkness - alone.

The darkness this time is not the sort that follows sunset. It was rather the sort of darkness that accompanied great events in ancient history. When he speaks of “darkness at noon,” Mark is telling his readers that the death of Jesus was an event that affected the whole universe. What was done on Golgotha, he is saying, was of ultimate significance for any place in the world, and for every place in the world at any time.

Our spiritual ancestors understood the darkness at noonday as a reflection of the dark night of the soul through which Jesus had been passing. When it was over, he cried out to God in words that have been remembered ever since. They came, we believe, as the climax to his experience of being betrayed, deserted and abandoned by humankind.

“My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?” This is the final abandonment! At this point, Jesus was totally deserted and completely alone! The cup of suffering had been drained even to the dregs.

The loneliness of Jesus’ suffering is a loneliness humans have always known. Pain brings with it a particular loneliness. It cannot be shared, not really. It must be borne alone. The absence of God is an experience that means something only to those who have ever known the presence of God. And the presence of God is still a reality if, in the midst of feeling completely forsaken, we are able to cry out, “My God!”

It is the experience of countless believers that, when all our resources have been exhausted and every experience denies the presence of God, the strength is still provided to search for God. The presence of God is real at all times, and in terrible places.

Even when we cannot bear to think of God at all, or even if we are able only to rail at God and against God, that is precisely what the psalmist tells us to do. "In sudden fear I had cried out, 'I have been cut off from the Lord!' But you heard my cry for mercy and answered my call for help."

In a strange sort of way Jesus was misunderstood to the end. Even the words of his final appeal to God were misunderstood by those who heard them. Some people thought he was calling for Elijah. Out of curiosity to see whether Elijah would come to rescue this Son of Israel at the last moment, they tried to keep him alive.

Then, writes Mark, Jesus died "with a loud cry." He died violently. As a result of his death, and of what followed his death, the religious life of humankind was forever transformed, no longer a way of salvation for a few, whether by right of office, race or religion. Since Christ's death and resurrection, the gates of the kingdom of God were thrown open to all believers.

The final hour, the end of time, all is over. And you and I are making our way, however slowly and painfully, toward the wonderful God who loves us all. Who then was the One who died? Who was the One who died as a result of the treachery of Judas, as a consequence of the betrayal of the disciples, as a sequel to the denial by Peter, as a result of the conspiracy of his own people?

He was a Jewish son of Galilee. He was a son of Mary, whose name has ever since been immortalized. He was a teacher of great charisma, a healer

known for his compassion, a young prophet, a true spokesman for God.

And he was more even than all of those things. He was, whatever else, the Son of God. And through him God has made the right of everyone the gifts of healing, wholeness, and peace. Through Him, God has given us the priceless gift of salvation. In all our dark times God's presence is there to surround us, forgive us, heal us, and restore us, helping us to face misunderstanding, rejection, lies and betrayal as Jesus did, the One crucified for us, and raised by God to glory, the Lord and Saviour of the world.

Amen.

BIDDING PRAYER FOR GOOD FRIDAY

BIDDING PRAYER

Let us pray brothers and sisters, for the holy church throughout the world.
(Silent prayer)

Almighty and eternal God, you have shown your glory to all nations in Jesus Christ. By your Holy Spirit guide the church and gather it throughout the world. Help it to persevere in faith, proclaim your name, and bring the good news of salvation in Christ to all people. We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Let us pray for Bishops Susan and Kathy, for our pastors, for our deacons and all servants of the church, and for all the people of God. (Silent prayer)

Almighty and eternal God, your Spirit guides the church and makes it holy. Strengthen and uphold our bishops, pastors, deacons, other ministers, musicians and lay leaders. Keep them in health and safety for the good of the church and help each of us in our various vocations to do faithfully the work to which you have called us. We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Let us pray for our siblings in Christ who share our faith. (Silent prayer)

Almighty and eternal God, you give your church unity. Look with favour on all who follow Jesus your Son. Make all the baptized one in the fullness of faith and keep us united in the fellowship of love. We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Let us pray for all Jewish people, the first to hear the word of God. (Silent prayer)

Almighty and eternal God, long ago you gave your promise to Abraham and your teaching to Moses. Hear our prayers that the people you called and elected as your own may receive the fulfillment of the covenant's promises. We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Let us pray for those who do not share our faith in Jesus Christ. (Silent prayer)

Almighty and eternal God, gather into your embrace all those who call out to you under different names. Bring an end to inter-faith strife, and make us more faithful witnesses of the love made known to us in your Son. We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Let us pray for those who do not believe in God. (Silent prayer)

Almighty and eternal God, you created humanity so that all may long to know you and find peace in you. Grant that all may recognize the signs of your love and grace in the world and in the lives of Christians, and gladly acknowledge you as the one true God. We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Let us pray for God's Creation. (Silent prayer)

Almighty and eternal God, you are the Creator of a magnificent universe. Hold all the worlds in the arms of your care and bring all things to fulfillment in you. We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Let us pray for those who serve in public office. (Silent prayer)

Almighty and eternal God, you are the champion of the poor and oppressed. In your goodness, give wisdom to those in authority so that all people may enjoy justice, peace, freedom, and share in the goodness of your Creation. We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Let us pray for those in need. (Silent prayer)

Almighty and eternal God, you give strength to the weary and new courage to those who have lost heart. Heal the sick, comfort the dying, give safety to travellers, free those unjustly deprived of liberty, and deliver your world from falsehood, hunger, and disease. Hear the prayers of all who call on you in any trouble, that they may have the joy of receiving your help in their need. We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**