

Good Friday 2022 readings \* April 15, 2022  
Langford Community Church \* Graham Gladstone

Peter

Sometimes people talk about 'the dark night of the soul.' That was the darkest night my soul has ever seen.

We had just eaten the Passover meal together when Jesus suggested that we go to the olive grove at Gethsemane. We'd been there many times before to pray and so I thought nothing of it as we crossed the valley.

When we arrived though, I knew that something was wrong. Jesus, unflappable Jesus, grew agitated, to the point where he took James and John and me aside and said "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." As He said it, it was as though His sweat was great drops of blood, falling before our eyes.

We knelt down near Him to pray but I couldn't keep my eyes open to save my life. I don't know if it was the wine or the late night but I was overcome with fatigue. Drifting in and out of sleep, I remember hearing Jesus praying - 36 "Abba, Father," ... "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." Three times, He prayed those words – "Not my will, but Thine be done."

I was jolted awake by the double shock of Jesus accosting me for sleeping and Judas storming into the grove with a crowd of soldiers armed with clubs and torches.

Judas slithered right up to Jesus and kissed Him on the cheek, some sort of pre-arranged signal I guess, because when he did that, the soldiers began to advance. I couldn't stand the thought of those thugs laying their hands on my Lord and so, quick as a whip, I whipped out my sword and slashed at the person standing nearest to me.

I lopped off his ear, but Jesus reached out to heal him, saying "Enough! Shall I not drink the cup my Father has given me? And besides, do you think I cannot call on

my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? 54 But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?"

The trembling in Jesus' voice was gone and the calm, confident composure that Jesus always had was back.

He said to the crowd – "Am I some dangerous revolutionary that you come with swords and clubs to arrest me? Why didn't you arrest me in the Temple? I was there every day. But this is your moment, the time when the power of darkness reigns" (Luke 22:52-53).

And with that, He allowed Himself to be betrayed into their hands. He, the Son of God, let these wicked men lay their hands on Him and lead Him away to suffer God-knows-what. He could have called on all the armies of Heaven to deliver Him, but He didn't. He let them arrest Him and take Him off to the high priests house.

Who does that? Why would He do that? Why would He lay down His freedom to go with them to certain death? Who does that? And why?

The religious leader

If there's one thing I hate, it's these self-righteousness religious nuts who claim to hear from God and gather a following around them. They burn bright for a while, but before long, their true colours show and they get exposed as the phoney's they are.

This one was different though. (*spoken as if you're announcing Him to a crowd*) 'Jesus of Nazareth, miracle worker, teacher extraordinaire.' We tried to dig up dirt on Him, but, nothing. This guy was clean as Holy of Holies. We had to go a more 'flexible' route to make sure justice was served. We found these two low-

lives who said that Jesus said that that He could tear down the Temple and rebuild it in three days. Ha! That's a ridiculous charge, but better than nothing.

And speaking of low-lives, after one of his own disciples turned him over to us, the soldiers led him into the chief priest's courtyard. Even though it was early morning, it was standing room only as people crowded in to see this 'temple trasher' in the flesh.

They yelled insults and called down curses... and yet, there He stood. Silent. Composed. Dignified.

The chief priest stood up and roared at Him – "Are you not going to answer? Are you really not going to defend yourself against these serious claims?!"

*(Pause)*

Nothing. Jesus remained silent.

The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."

With that, Jesus finally spoke.

"It is as you say," he replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has spoken blasphemy! What more proof do we need? This man wants to put himself in the place of God!"

He wheeled around to face the crowd and shouted – "What is your verdict?! What do you think of this man?!"

At this they shouted back – "Death! He deserves to die for this wickedness!"

Then it began. They spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him and said, "Prophecy to us, Christ. Who hit you that time?"

And yet, through it all, Jesus stood firm. He didn't give them the pleasure of seeing Him break. He just stood there and took it.

Who does that? Who just stands there and doesn't fight back? Why would He not defend Himself, but instead go along with their mania? Who does that? And why?

Pilate

The servants came to wake me that morning but I was already up, listening to the sound of the mob growing ever nearer. I didn't know what it would be this time, but I knew it couldn't be good.

These religious fools wouldn't even come into the palace lest they make themselves (*sounding snooty*) 'ceremonially unclean' and so (*disdainfully*) I had to go out to them.

When I saw the man in the middle of the mob, I knew immediately what was happening. The religious leaders were jealous of this guy but they had no case against him. They just wanted to get rid of him and so off they went to Pontius Pilate to do their dirty work.

They couldn't even get their story straight. Some people were shouting gibberish about the temple, something about tearing it down; some people were shouting about taxes and whether they had to pay them; others were claiming this guy was trying to be king.

There was no way I could sort this out out there, so I brought the accused, Jesus, into the palace.

When it was just me and him, I looked Him in the eye and said 'What do you have to say for yourself?'

Nothing. He said nothing. He just stood there quietly. Quietly, yet intensely.

'Do you not hear the testimony they are bringing against you?' I asked. 'These are some serious charges!'

Again, nothing. Normally at this point an accused man would be defending himself, telling his side of the story, throwing accusations at his accusers, but this guy? Nothing. I was getting exasperated so I finally asked him point blank:

'Are you a king?'

Suddenly the floodgates opened.

"Is that your own idea," he asked, "or did others talk to you about me?"

"Am I a Jew?" I replied. "It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done to make them do this to you?"

Jesus replied, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."

Ah, now we were getting somewhere. "So you *are* a king, then!" I said and then he came back with the most out there nonsense I've ever heard.

"You are right in saying I am a king" he said. "In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

"What is truth?" I responded. This guy was many things, but not a king. A few loaves short of a bread basket maybe but definitely not a danger to anyone, so I took him back outside.

When I had the crowd's attention, I told them "I find no basis for a charge against this man. I will have him flogged and then let him go."

Well, it was like I'd just released a herd of hogs into the temple – utter chaos, seething anger – this mighty roar arose from the crowd saying "Kill him and release Barabbas to us!" Barabbas was in prison for trying to overthrow the government; he'd killed some guys and (*sounding incredulous*) now they wanted *him* free?

"You want HIM (ie., *Barabbas*) on the streets, rather than this guy, Jesus?"

"Give us Barabbas! Give us Barabbas!" they shouted.

Now look, I was already on thin ice with Rome because of a riot just like this one was about to be so I decided that it was better to throw one man to the wolves than my whole career so I sat down on the judgment seat and looked out at the crowd.

"I find no guilt in this man; certainly no reason to put him to death. But what would you have me do?"

"Crucify him!" they shouted. "Crucify him!"

At that very moment, a servant rushed up with a message from my wife. It said "Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him."

So I got up, called for a bowl of water and dipped my fingers into it, flinging the water onto the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," I said. "But I will do as you wish."

With that, I sent him off to be flogged and put to death. I gave orders for Barabbas to go free. And I sat down to think about what had just happened.

That man claimed to be a king and yet he was willing to die. He didn't defend himself but instead agreed to die so another might live. Why would he give up his royal privilege to die for someone else? Who does that? And why?

The centurion

I've never seen a prisoner quite like him. Condemned to die, entirely under our authority, and yet acting as if HE was the one in control. Acting as if HE was the one marching himself to the Cross.

We did our part for sure. The governor said that this guy was supposed to be a king, so we found him a robe (*mocking*) 'more fitting of his stature.' One of the guys rolled some thorns into a crown and jammed it on his head. And then we 'knighted' him – thirty nine lashes with a Roman whip.

Once he could take no more we made him carry the cross to 'the Skull' but the poor sod barely made it fifty feet. This guy from the crowd, a Cyrenee (sigh-REE-nee) by the looks of it, we grabbed him and made him carry the cross the rest of the way.

When we got to the hill, we stripped him of his garments and nailed him to the cross. He had some nice stuff too – a seamless garment, woven from top to bottom. We rolled dice for that and split the rest.

And that's when the weird stuff started happening.

Out of nowhere, Jesus started praying. "Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they are doing."

And then he started talking, to his followers evidently. I don't know why they'd even be there – weren't they afraid that we'd nab them too? But there they were, a bunch of ladies and another guy; one of 'em was his mom I think. He said 'woman, here is your son' and to the man 'here is your mother;' it was as though he was making arrangements for his mother to be cared for when He was gone.

And then the thieves that we crucified with him that day start to argue over Jesus.

The one guy said - "So you're the Messiah, hunh? Prove it by saving yourself-- and us, too, while you're at it!"

But the other crook protested, "Don't you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man, he hasn't done anything wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom."

And get this, Jesus replied, "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise."

And then the darkness started. It was like dusk, like all the light in the world was snuffed out and replaced with darkness – but it was only noon! It stayed like that for three hours and then suddenly Jesus cried out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

I don't know what came over me; this wave of pity I guess for this 'forsaken king.'

I immediately ran over to get a sponge and filled it with rancid wine. Better than nothing. I put it on a stick and lifted it to his lips. He took a sip then shouted 'Father, into my hands I commend my spirit' and then he bowed his head and said 'it is finished.' And with that he was gone. Surely that was the son of God!

I've been on cross duty a million times but I've never seen anything like that. We had to break the legs to get rid of the other guys, but Jesus was gone. The boss stuck him with a spear to be sure, but I knew when I heard him say 'it was finished' that it was finished.

Those words stuck with me the rest of the day. 'It is finished.' What was finished? Was he talking about his life or something else? And what was he doing caring for others as he hung on the cross? Most people are begging for their lives, yelling curses on us, but he had the presence of mind to care for his mother, to care for these common criminals even! Who does that? And why would he give up his dying breaths to help another when he knew death was at hand? Why would He be so concerned for others when He was about to die? Who does that? And why?



While we were still sinners \* Romans 5:6-11

Good Friday \* April 15, 2022 \* Langford Community Church \* Graham Gladstone

The account of Jesus' passion that we heard this morning begs two questions. Do you know what they are? Who does that? And why?

You know the answer to the first one – Jesus does that. Jesus DID that. But the second question remains: why? Why would Jesus lay down His life and die on a Cross?

Well, as it turns out, Paul tells us that in the fifth chapter of Romans. When we were going through faithBasics, I skipped over it because it lays out so clearly why Jesus did what He did, so let's look now together at Romans 5 and answer that question: why Jesus did do what He did that Good Friday more than two thousand years ago? Turn with me in your Bibles to Romans 5, starting in verse 6.

At Romans 5, verse 6, Paul writes:

6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

This one verse captures two of the most foundational truths in all of the Bible. 1. Without God, we were ungodly, sinful people. Remember Romans 3? Verse 10 – 'there is no one righteous, not even one.' Verse 12 – 'there is no one who does good, not even one.' Verse 23 – 'All have sinned and fallen short of God's glorious ideal.' Before we knew God, we were all slaves to sin. We were the 'ungodly' Paul is talking about here.

But that's not even the worst part – not only were we slaves to sin, we couldn't do anything about it! Our sin nature kept us from seeking after God, even though we needed Him more than anything else in the world. Again, Romans 3:11: 'no one seeks after God, not even one.' Romans 8:8 – 'those who are controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.' We were all controlled by the sinful nature, therefore, we were all literally powerless to save ourselves.

**BUT**, second foundational truth in this verse – at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

When the time was right, Jesus died to help those who couldn't help themselves. Anyone who says 'God helps those who help themselves' – point them to this verse and say 'Actually, that couldn't be farther from the truth. In His mercy God helps those who CAN'T help themselves.' Jesus actually died to help helpless people.

Now, that's a pretty far-out idea – the idea that someone would die for another - and so Paul takes a moment to think about it.

7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die.

I think that what Paul is getting at here is that we have a hierarchy of who we'd be willing to die for. A righteous man, a guy who does right by the law, who does good because he's supposed to, maybe. A good man, who does good things because he's good natured, probably. A Mother Theresa, yeah, more than like you'd be willing to die for someone her.

8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Paul puts his finger here on the most incredible truth – I think – in all of the Bible. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Sure, someone might be willing to die for a good man, maybe, but for a sinner? No way! Somebody might be willing to die for a righteous man, but for a man who was actively opposed to him? Not in a million years.

And yet that's exactly what Jesus did. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. When we wanted nothing to do with Him, when we were so taken by our own sinful nature and selfish desires, Jesus laid down His life to save us. That is an incredible truth.

I mean think about. This a pretty serious question but think about it -

Would you be willing to die for one of your children? Of course. I'd be willing to lay down my life for Ben or Anna if it came to it.

What about a spouse or a parent? Yeah, of course.

What about a co-worker or a neighbour? Would you be willing to die for them? Well, maybe. I guess it depends on the situation, how well you know them.

What about a stranger? Maybe. Maybe not.

What about an enemy? Would you be willing to die for someone who wanted nothing to do with you and made that clear at every opportunity? Probably not right?

And yet that's what Jesus did on Good Friday. While we were still sinners, still opposed to Him, still estranged to Him, Christ died for us.

And why did He do this? Why did He decide to take the ultimate step of laying down His life to forgive the very people who took His life? How does the verse start? 'God demonstrates His love for us in this.' Jesus' death on the Cross shows us just how deeply God loves us. Jesus' willingness to die in our place shows us just how much He loves us.

That's why Jesus did what He did on Good Friday. Jesus did what He did because He loves us enough to die for us, even when we wanted nothing to do with Him. Jesus died to show us the limitlessness of His commitment to us.

That's amazing. That's incredible. That means that God didn't wait for us to get right with Him. We didn't. We couldn't. We were actively opposed to Him, laughing at His sovereignty, and yet He chose to die in our place, to win us back, all because of His love for us. It's amazing.

You know the song? Jesus loves me this I know/for the Bible tells me so? This is one of the places the Bible says it. Jesus loves you SO deeply that He was willing to die for you. Not you plural; you singular.

And we know that because of what Jesus went through on Good Friday. We know that because of the Cross. Jesus didn't just SAY He's committed to you; He lived it out.

8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Now that on its own is pretty incredible, but Paul wants us to remember that there's more. Jesus' love for us, Jesus' commitment to us didn't end on Good Friday. It's still going. And what Jesus did then has implications for how we live now.

Look at verse 9 -

9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

This is a classic rabbinic formula – 'if this is true, then how much more with THIS be true' – like 'if you like Turkey Point, you're going to LOVE Miami Beach!'

If we have been justified by His blood – that is, if Jesus' death on the Cross made us right with God – how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him. If Jesus died to save us, how much more will He LIVE to deliver us? There is no possibility that we will not be saved in the end. We will not stand before the judgment seat of God and find ourselves barred from entry to eternal life. Jesus died on the Cross to deliver us on Good Friday and lives even now to deliver us in the end. And Paul continues -

10 For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

Right? If Jesus was willing to die for us when we were His enemies, how much more do you think He is going to be willing to do now that we are His friends? He is not going to turn His back on us and leave us to our own devices; He is going to help us to grow in grace and holiness, to stand in the face of trials, to give us wisdom when we need it most.

Ernst Kasemann writes:

“The Christ who died for us also lives for us, and destroys the threats of the future as he destroyed the evil power of the past. [Jesus is the personification of the reality that God is ‘for us.’]”

God demonstrates His love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Imagine then, just what He will do for us now we are His children. He will deliver from sin. He will provide for our needs. He will help us in ministry and He will grant us eternal life.

Jesus did what He did on Good Friday to show us how deep His love runs. Embrace that love and build your life upon it.