



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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GOOD FRIDAY, APRIL 18, 2025

ISAIAH 52:13-53:12; HEBREWS 4:14-16; 5:7-9; PSALM 22; JOHN 18:1-19:42

GOOD FRIDAY: ON THE TRIDUUM JOURNEY



The Opening Bidding for the Good Friday Collects [*Dear People of God: Our heavenly Father sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved; that all who believe in him might be delivered from the power of sin and death, and become heirs with him of everlasting life. We pray, therefore, for people everywhere according to their needs.*]

We are approaching the midway point of our Triduum journey, a three-day trek designed with guideposts by which we find our way each day. It is an arduous journey, not for the

faint of heart, but in the Church's long-toothed wisdom, it is meant to be one liturgical trek across the three days.

No one day's service makes sense except within the context of the other two: Maundy Thursday's deep memories around a meal shared in community but with knowledge that it would be Jesus' last with them; Good Friday's somber tones contemplating Christ's arms of love outstretched on the hard wood of the cross; Holy Saturday's soul-stirring silence; all orienting toward the Great Vigil tomorrow night that opens into Easter light. There is hope, even today, on this Friday we dare call "good."

The Paschal Mystery makes no sense without the three-day passage taken together. Christ in community, Christ on the cross, Christ arising from the tomb. They are "of a cloth."

Can we see it as one liturgical trek?

Tomorrow night, by the light of handheld candles, we will baptize seven persons: Kenneth, Colton, Kia, Adrian, Emily, Lana, and Jessica. Our newest siblings in community, but the indissoluble bonds of beloved affection that God has for each of them transcend mortal time, transcend our capacity for human memory; the baptismal rite is the ancient way we ritually come to know this belovedness in our bones.

That we baptize while still in the dark tomorrow night, but with our candles lit in paschal hope for the turn to come, helps us

remember that we are baptized into the death of Jesus, and arise from the waters into new life. Baptism is a both-and proposition.

The vows those seven will take include three renunciations, followed by three affirmations orienting to Jesus. This three-fold pattern stretches back to ancient times. We know this was the design of Christian baptism from at least the Second Century, possibly even the first, in oral form.

The renunciations are believed to have their origin in Good Friday's liturgy, the derivative of which we continue to engage here in modernity. The Biddings and Solemn Collects we will pray in a few moments offer a litany of ways we fall short of God's vision for humanity, while prayerfully striving for justice and peace. The baptismal renunciations are a distillation of this litany that speak of that brokenness, in raw unsettling terms, as manifestations of evil:

- Do you renounce the forces of evil that rebel against God?
- Do you renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God?
- Do you renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God?

On this Good Friday, when all is not right with the world, can we see the three-fold

pattern of these renunciations in the shadowy haunts of evil that had its way with Jesus, that has its way with our institutions meant to serve for good, that has its way with us, too, with all of us?

I know we don't like to talk much about evil, but there's no avoiding it today, if we are going to be honest.

Evil corrupts and destroys, spiritually, institutionally, personally.

- Pilate, in his world of alternative facts and horrific violence, yearns to know, "what is truth?"
- Peter, in his collapsing world of fear, denies Jesus and his true self before the cock can awaken to the dawn of a new world.
- The soldiers mock and maim Jesus for sport.
- And we are in the crowd crying, Crucify him, Crucify him!

This is a day of complicit brokenness, and yet Jesus chooses to speak truth and love into the mix, inviting us to orient that way as well.

Evil had its way with Jesus that day; evil has its way with us. There is no "them" there. This is our story, the human story, and we tell it in its entirety today, as difficult as that is, because evil lurks and lingers where our

anxieties and prejudices and power convince us that violence is the way.

Jesus hangs on the cross and says, it is not the way.

It takes great courage to hold the tense contractures of Good Friday on our Triduum journey.

Which is why we continue orienting to the ancient Good Friday Biddings and Collects.

While they are not exhaustive, they are comprehensive in scope, acknowledging the brokenness of our common humanity, but also laying claim to the promise that God's love is universal, encompassing all humanity. No one is beyond the reach of Christ's arms of outstretched love on the cross. No one is irredeemable in God's grand design, and divine goodness is not finished with us yet.

In ancient wisdom, each collect is preceded by appeals made to you, chanted so as to resonate with your soul. First, *let us kneel in silent prayer...* silent prayer for a time, to hold the cruciform life of Christ before us, to hold the suffering you've experienced, and the suffering you've caused. To hold what you can of it in the moment, trusting that Christ holds it with you.

And then the second appeal comes... *Arise*, a three-syllable chant to arise, a foreshadowing

of things to come, and turn into the affirmations of divine embrace and eternal love. We bear witness today, in the midst of all this, that God is acting in ways that we cannot fully imagine yet.

We come today amidst Good Friday's somber tones contemplating Jesus's arms of love outstretched on the hard wood of the cross and then arise in trust that Jesus came

and lived among us, as kin and companion, and Christ for all, refusing to let evil and violence have the final word.

The story is not finished on this day we call "good," nor is our liturgical work on this Triduum journey of life. Let us press on, orienting toward the Great Vigil that opens into Easter light. Together, we will find our way.



SAINT MARK'S
EPISCOPAL CATHEDRAL

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