



# SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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TUESDAY IN HOLY WEEK, APRIL 16, 2019  
ISAIAH 49:1-7; PSALM 71: 1-14; 1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-31; JOHN 12:20-36

## NO REGRETS

In the 1940's, archaeologists unearthed scraps of papyrus that, when pieced together, turned out to be an ancient homily. The homily would later be attributed to Melito, Bishop of Sardis. Written sometime around 160 CE, Melito likely intended the homily to be some kind of Easter proclamation.

Melito's sermon revealed something important. It became one of the earliest pieces of evidence directly linking the Paschal feast and the suffering of Jesus. Melito based his claim on the use of the word "pascha" which is scattered throughout Greek translations on the Bible. Despite valiant efforts to get his Greek right, Melito made, what is arguably, a mistake. You see, in the Greek New Testament, only one letter separates the root words for Paschal feast and

the verb meaning "to suffer." One letter!<sup>1</sup> While the Church has since developed a more finessed understanding of the Paschal mystery, Melito's sermon highlights age old questions:

Where is God in the middle of suffering?  
What does Jesus's own suffering have to do with our own sufferings?

I remember the first time a seminary professor posed those same questions in class. It was Holy Week, so what better time to explore the thornier issues of the spiritual life. It turns out would be one of those pivotal points in my formation: the first time I would truly understand why textbook answers don't often translate into good pastoral responses...and why historical theologians

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<sup>1</sup>In her book *Construing the Cross*, Frances Young points out the Melito's error.

and pastoral theologians are two very different types of people.

Jesus wondered about those same hard questions, too. Who can blame him? As he prepared for Passover, chaos erupted around him. People came from all over the Mediterranean just to get a glimpse of him. His disciples still didn't understand how to make decisions without consulting him. And then there were those churchy people. They watched his every move, waiting to pounce at just the right moment. No wonder his spirit was troubled.

His inner stirrings bring him to his knees. At that point, all he can do is pray. It is tender and honest; this conversation Jesus has with God. Jesus knows the easy way is tempting. He could back out. But that's really rouse, because the easy way never really easy, is it? It comes with its own sufferings that will linger long after the physical pain is gone. The path of the cross will be filled with pain, abandonment, and death. It is also the path to life. God hears the cries of this beloved child and responds with care and encouragement. ...and the rest is history, so to speak.

But even as I say this, I wonder if this is one of those perfect text book answers my theology professor was looking for. We know this story on paper. Even those who think they have no need or desire to step foot in a

church know the basics of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection...at least at some intellectual level. But that doesn't feel like enough. Jesus suffered *for* us, but was that it? What about his willingness to suffer alongside us...to be present to our deepest wounds and pains? That feels like the heart of this story that matters.

When I finally moved back to Seattle after seminary, a dear friend took me to lunch. Toward the end of meal, he leaned in, looked me squarely in the eye, and asked a question that still haunts me to this day. "Do you have any regrets?" The question caught me off guard and upended me. A long silence fell over the space. Eventually, words came together to form some semblance of an answer. I heard myself say "yes, I do have regrets" and then, to my surprise, out spilled unpolished, raw feelings I didn't even know I had. He listened with the tender care of the soul friend that he is. When I finished, he said "Be careful. Those are the kinds of regrets that will eat you alive if you're not careful. Don't ignore them."

Dave had found a way to pierce beyond the armor of my intellect. In the process, the deep wounds of my heart were exposed...wounds I didn't know existed...wounds I didn't want anyone to know about, especially myself. That day still haunts me, in part, because it is the day I knew Jesus's suffering in a new,

more visceral way. Jesus's suffering was no longer was trapped on the pages of a book. That day, his suffering became my suffering, too.

Henri Nouwen wrote that the primary task of ministers is not to take the pain away. Instead, they help a person focus on the pain enough so it can be felt and then shared with others.<sup>2</sup> I want to be clear. The goal of sharing one's pain is not to perpetuate a pathological process that continues the brokenness from generation to generation. Instead, when done in a healthy, safe way, sharing the pain helps to transform so that some good can come from it. That how healing begins.

I think Jesus shared that idea. God's redeeming work on the cross was not a magic trick designed to make the painful parts the human experience go away. Instead, it was about standing in solidarity with all of us...with all of humanity, helping our,

“wounds and pains become openings for a new vision.”<sup>3</sup>

In his living and his dying, healing has always been the heart of Jesus's ministry. But not just his own. Even while he was nailed to the cross, Jesus found a way heal his neighbors. Even now, Jesus finds a way to stand alongside us, too.

Nouwen says, “the Master is coming -- not tomorrow, but today, not next year, but this year, not after all our misery is passed, but in the middle of it ... right here”<sup>4</sup>... right now. In this place. That healing is happening. The wounds which Jesus carried to the cross...those were his wounds...and they are ours, too. The wounds of the world are being offered up to God and transformed into something new and unexpected.

May this holy week and this healing Eucharist be a time of transformation for you and me. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup>Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* ((New York, NY: Image, 2010) 99.

<sup>3</sup>The Wounded Healer, 100.

<sup>4</sup>The Wounded Healer, 102.

**John 12:20-36** *[Among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal*

life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

"Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say-- 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. The crowd answered him, "We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?" Jesus said to them, "The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light."

*After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them.]*



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