



# SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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GOOD FRIDAY, APRIL 15, 2022  
ISAIAH 52:13-53:12; PSALM 22:1-30; HEBREWS 4:14-16; 5:7-9; JOHN 18:1-19:42

## LOOKING IN THE MIRROR

It is hard to know how to begin – the story of Jesus' passion is heartbreaking. I'm remembering my pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 2018. Our group walked the Via Dolorosa, the route through the Old City of Jerusalem that represents the path that Jesus took on the way to the cross.

It goes through the heart of Jerusalem, following a series of narrow cobblestone paths lined with shops, churches, and monuments. We stopped 14 times to listen to a portion of the Passion narrative and pray together. Jerusalem was bustling, so we had to wind our way through busy crowds, who were headed in all directions and speaking multiple languages.

As we progressed toward the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the traditional site of Jesus' crucifixion and burial, each person in the group seemed to withdraw into themselves, feeling the weight and grief of what lay ahead. Our guide encouraged us to imagine what it might have been like for Jesus and his family and disciples to travel to Golgotha in the midst of strangers going about their daily business.

It was hard to grasp the reality of such violence and suffering alongside a multitude of indifference.

And there was a multitude on Good Friday. As we listened to the Passion, did you notice how many people were close to what happened that day?

Judas, a detachment of Roman soldiers, temple police, high priests, slaves and servants of the powerful, crowds of regular people. And the disciples – women and men who loved Jesus deeply.

So many people watched it all unfold. The violent arrest and sham of a trial, the mocking and flogging, the death sentence and horror of crucifixion. I wonder what it was like for them to witness an innocent man made to suffer and die. What it was like to have a hand in it.

This week, I've been reflecting on the individuals in this passage from John, and the ways they seek to avoid the pain of witnessing Jesus' crucifixion. Ways that are likely familiar to us.

The soldiers and police are merely doing their job, acting on orders they cannot possibly disobey. The crowd justifies his death with false

accusations. Simon Peter expresses his grief through anger, injuring a slave, and then falsifying history by denying Jesus. Annas and Caiphas try to make someone else the decision maker so they can't be blamed. Pilate insists it's not about him, he has no stake in things. And many others hurry by, keeping to themselves and averting their faces, choosing to numb their discomfort with other distractions.

Dr. Catherine Meeks of the Absalom Jones Center writes in her blog<sup>1</sup> about how hard it is to “stare pain in the face – emotional or physical.” She is responding to the war in Ukraine. But she's also writing about how we resist accepting *any* painful truth – the truth of a dying loved one or the brutality of systemic racism or the crushing impact of climate change.

We have so many ways to try to deny the reality of pain, but these ways always come at a cost. Each time we

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<https://www.centerforracialhealing.org/post/gift-of-being-brokenhearted>

choose a path of avoidance, small parts of our lives shrink. Our hearts become more closed and new possibilities to live fully become blocked.

The only way to wholeness in the face of suffering, Dr. Meeks writes, is to have the *courage to be brokenhearted*. To turn toward the pain and let one's heart be opened by it, which then creates the space to hold the pain.<sup>2</sup>

This is an act of brave and vulnerable surrender, and we see it in the story of Good Friday. Because while many present seek to escape the horror of Jesus' execution, four remain at the foot of the cross – Mary, Jesus' mother; Mary Magdalene; Mary the wife of Clopas; and the beloved disciple, traditionally named as John. They are devastated and grieving, but they don't look away. There is nothing they can do except love him until the end, together.

When Jesus sees them holding him in their broken hearts, he offers his compassion in return, binding his mother and the disciple together as family. “Woman, here is your son.” “Man, here is your mother.” Jesus' broken heart meets theirs and, even at the point of death, something new and life-giving is born. “From that hour the disciple took Mary into his own home.”

Dr. Meeks writes that it is only acceptance of painful reality that can open new possibilities for a more full and free daily life.<sup>3</sup> The courage to be brokenhearted doesn't come from personal strength but from our bonds to each other, through which God can inspire and empower us to love despite the pain.

We will conclude our service today with contemplation of the cross, a mystery and paradox of both death and new life. St. Clare of Assisi regarded the cross as a mirror<sup>4</sup> in

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Rohr, September 6, 2016.

which we can clearly see ourselves and the world around us. In contemplating the tragic and brutal death of Jesus, she saw our own human capacity for violence, betrayal, and domination. How we, like the disciples, try to avoid fully facing the pain of others.

And in contemplating Jesus' compassion and faithfulness, St. Clare saw God's loving solidarity with those who suffer. Which means that when we turn toward pain with an open heart, we are at the same time surrendering ourselves to the One who will fill us with courageous and transformative love.

As we look into the mirror of the cross today, may we see ourselves and the world around us, plainly and honestly. May we open our hearts to the pain of humanity and creation, willing to be brokenhearted and willing to be changed. May we not withdraw into ourselves, joining the multitude of indifference, but reach out to each other, trusting that God will guide us, together, through death to new life.

Amen.



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EPISCOPAL CATHEDRAL