

God's Friday
Preached by Rev. Patrick Hunnicutt
Good Friday
3/21/08

So here we are. Once again, gathered on a Friday night, to observe and remember Christ crucified on a cross.

There is some ambiguity surrounding the name of this day. Some believe that the term, "Good Friday" is actually an evolution of "Gatt-Freitag", or "God's Friday."

In one missing letter, it seems that truth can sometimes be found in typos. For, if there was ever a Friday that belonged to God, this would be the one.

If this is God's Friday, then what about it is Good for us? What makes this night, Good, for you? What, I wonder, has brought you here?

- Perhaps you were fortunate enough to attend last night's service, and you want to see what crazy things your pastors will say and do tonight.
- Perhaps you are here because you know that life is not always filled with laughter and giggling, and therefore, neither should our worship.
 - Good Friday is perhaps the one service in the Christian tradition that resolutely acknowledges the darkness of this world. The darkness that terrorizes vulnerable people, and soils vulnerable people to become terrorists.
 - This same darkness shrouds us in fear, so that we become so anxious for own safety, so lost in ourselves and tenaciously worried about what others might think of us, that we fail to join the Good Samaritan on the side of the road and tend to those who have been left for dead.
 - Good Friday can be good, because it's real about the darkness.
- Maybe you're here because this is the one service that does not compel you to sing, "Alleluias" when praise is far from your lips.
 - There is no pressure, tonight, to mingle after the service with a smile on your face and pretend that everything is alright, that all is well.
 - Tonight, you can sit and sing and listen and go home quietly into the dark, but moonlit night.
- Maybe you are here because of suffering, or grief, and you yearn to hear once again that our God is a God who bears that suffering and grieves with us, for us.
- Perhaps you have a sense, and want it confirmed, that for things to be made right, Jesus must first pass through that which is not right. That he cannot be Christ to us without the cross.
 - And so, you come, because to forego the solemnity of this night and skip ahead to the sweet brightness of Easter lilies and the resonant booms of the Commonwealth Brass would be to overlook the blood drenched sacrifice Jesus makes on our behalf.

You have come. We are here.

But if this is God's Friday, we must consider not only what has brought us here, but what brought Jesus. What brought him to the cross?

One might say that it was betrayal.

Betrayal engulfs Jesus throughout this story, as told by John.

- Of course, there is Judas, who sold out his leader, teacher and friend by revealing his location to those who would come and arrest and crucify him.
- There are the crowds of people, whom Jesus knew as lost sheep to be tended, who turned on their good shepherd with cries of "Crucify him"

- There is Peter, warming himself by the fire while shivering with fear. When asked if he was a disciple, Peter sounded the bell of denial, ringing three times “I am not.” “I am not!” I AM NOT!
- And there is Jesus himself, who looks below his pierced feet at his Mother, Mary, and the disciple whom he loved, and says, “Woman, here is your son.”
 - Can you imagine the betrayal that burned in Mary’s heart upon hearing these words?
 - Through the voices of our choir, Mary sings:
 - “Oh you who bear the pain of the whole earth, I bore you;
 - Oh you whose tears give human tears their worth, I laughed with you.
 - You, who when your hem is touched, give power, I nourished you;
 - Oh you who hold the world in your embrace, I carried you;
 - whose arms encircle the world with grace, I once held you;
 - Oh you who laughed and ate and walked the shore, I played with you.
 - This man standing next to me is not my son... YOU, are my Son. And you are leaving me.

Betrayal. It is the lurking subtext of Jesus’ story.

But it is not the story.

Jesus did not find himself on the cross because he was betrayed, or because he sought to betray.

No, Jesus was crucified because he gave himself up. Jesus was heaven-bent with devotion to God, whom he called “Father.”

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God, and the Word was with God,” John writes. The rest of the gospel is a testimony to the ways in which Jesus sought to be one with God. To be devoted.

Speaking of his Father, Jesus said, “I always do what is pleasing to him” (8:29) “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my father.” (10:17-18)

As compared with Matthew, Mark and Luke, the Jesus of John’s gospel is not a suffering servant.

- He shouts no anguished plea: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me”.
- Jesus does not lie prostrate in the garden, beads of blood dripping from his forehead, praying to God that this cup might pass.
- Instead, Jesus simply asks, “Am I not to drink the cup that my Father has given me to drink?”
- A few weeks ago, Larry preached a sermon about Lazarus and the sacrifice of energy and resources that is demanded of those who care for the disabled and chronically ill.
- That same day, there was an article published in the Sunday Post magazine about a man who endures the strain and fatigue of caring for his ill wife, stricken with the degenerative nightmare of Huntington’s disease.
- Every day, he brings himself again and again to her side, feeding her when she could not be fed, lifting her when she could not walk.
- He does all this not because he is seeking hardship, but because he knows no other way to be than to be devoted to her.

That’s Jesus. Devoted to God, because he is one with God. One with God, because he is devoted to God.

He knows no other way.

And so, here we are.

And again I will ask you what has brought you here?

Are you here because of the darkness that surrounds you? Are you here because of the suffering and grief and betrayal that overwhelm you? Are you here to be mindful of the reality and truth that resurrection cannot occur without crucifixion? Perhaps...perhaps all of these.

But could you also be here because of devotion -- the devotion that brings a man to his ailing wife...the devotion that brought Christ to his cross, and the devotion that brings us together with the shimmers and ripples of faith and hope that still reverberate in us, despite everything.

As disciples, we are called to mirror Jesus' devotion, as dimly as we are wont to do.

- Like Peter, we have made our mistakes and our lives have often denied any relationship with the one whom we call Lord.
- Like the crowds, we often lose our way and get caught in the web of the murderous mob.
- Like Mary, we often look up to God and feel betrayed, abandoned, as though we have lost the most precious parts of ourselves.

But the story that we tell tonight does not end tonight.

Yes, Jesus has been killed and buried in a garden.

But unlike that first garden, which has forever been remembered for the cunning of the serpent and rebellion of Adam and Eve, this garden will bear for us the promise -- the promise that Jesus' devotion, which lifted him high, will also lift him up, and us with him.

The tomb will be emptied of death, and a saving life will emerge.

And then, we might enjoy the giggles and laughter of Alleluia.

God's Friday. Good.

Amen.