

Journey of Love

Text: Isaiah 50:4-9a

Philippians 2:5-11 (Series C. Passion Sunday) Ps.31:9-16

Luke 23:1-49

The chief priests and the teachers of the Law were looking for a way to arrest Jesus secretly and put him to death.

Prayer:

I know that this isn't the first time that you have heard the story of the **arrest, trial, and crucifixion** of Jesus. When we hear it so many times, we're inclined to think of the injustice and the tragedy of an innocent man dying but, at times, overlook the violence that lies behind the Gospel accounts. They did kill him in a particularly cruel, painful, and violent way.

The Gospels don't give us much of the detail about what happened to the man who was cruelly beaten to a pulp with a whip that had balls of lead or pieces of bone tied to each of its strands; the man who was spat on and had a crown of thorns pressed on his head; the man whose hands and feet were nailed to wood, before being hung up to bleed and suffocate in utter agony.

The violence of the cross wasn't something short and swift; it went on for hours. The Gospel writers simply give us the barest outline of what happened on that awful day some 2,000 years ago.

Today, when we think of the cross, we are more inclined to think of a cross of smooth polished wood or a piece of jewelry that we wear around our necks, rather than blood-soaked wood. It's easy to read this story and miss the violence it contains. But the events leading up to Good Friday were anything but violent.

Today is Palm Sunday. We hear of the glorious occasion when Jesus entered Jerusalem. Jesus, riding on that humble donkey into the city of Jerusalem, while children spread palm branches on the street in front of him, and those on the side of the road shouting "*Hosanna, Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.*" Perhaps Palm Sunday didn't make much of an impact on the city of Jerusalem. These were festival days. Jerusalem was crowded.

During the Passover it became a crowded city with the addition of pilgrims and worshippers. And this man riding on a donkey, with the crowd cheering, probably didn't make a big impression on the City.

But those people who stood on the side of the road knew that something special was happening. Someone special was entering their city. And so they shouted "Hosanna!" Amid all the happiness, cheering, and waving of palm branches, there was only one who knew that this week would end in violence.

The one who rode the donkey was fully aware that "*... the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him ... and kill him....*" In just a few days, he would experience the pain and cruelty reserved only for the worst and most hardened criminals. The crowd that shouted, "*Hosanna, Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,*" a few days later, would be shouting, "*Crucify, crucify him!*"

As they drove the nails into his hands and feet and as his blood soaked the wooden beam of the cross, one could hardly believe that they were shedding the blood of God himself; they were wounding the man who had come to save the very people who were striking the blows and driving in the nails. He was dying to save the people who put him on the cross. He was dying for those people who called out, laughed and made fun of him, taunted him to come down and save himself. This man on the cross did not look like God. But he is God. The apostle Paul summed it up like this:

He (Christ Jesus) always had the nature of God ... Of his own free will he gave up all he had, and took the nature of a servant. He became like a human being and appeared in human likeness. He was humble and walked the path of obedience all the way to death— his death on the cross" (Phil 2:6-8).

He had it all, my friends, but gave it all up. And what sometimes is devastating for us to realize is that he did it *for* us and *because* of us. When the great artist Rembrandt came to paint the scene of the crucifixion, he painted his own face on one of those people in the mob. He knew that it was for his sins that Jesus was nailed to the tree. It can be easily said that Rembrandt could have painted every one of our faces in the crowd that day as they called for Jesus' death, not just any death, but the worst kind of death. There was nothing sweet and gentle about the crowd that called for Jesus' death – they called for the violent and painful death on a cross.

That spiritual song "*Were you there when they crucified my Lord?*" haunts us. One verse says, "*Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?*" There is only one answer to that question; yes! It was my sin that crucified Jesus on the first Good Friday.

When we look at the figure stretched out on the cross, or read the story of Jesus' death in the Gospel accounts, God wants us all to see that it is *our* sin that is being paid for. He wants us to see that through the violence, the suffering and death of Jesus, our peace was being made with God. He wants us to see what lengths God had to go to in order to get rid of the punishment that we deserve and to restore our friendship with him again.

The Son of God, Lord of all lords, the creator and ruler of the universe, had it all, and he gave it all up just for us. He became a human like us. I'd guess that's why the Gospel writers don't give us a lot of detail about the violence that happened that day. They don't want us to get sidetracked from the real issue. They want us to focus on the reason for all the pain and suffering. They want us to see that it was for us that he died. They want us to realize that this death has brought about reconciliation between God and us.

The year was 1927, a man named Asibi, a native of West Africa, was stricken with the deadly disease called yellow fever. Thousands died from this dreaded disease. However, Asibi lived. It seems that his body had conquered the disease. Asibi's blood contained the antibodies from which to begin to develop a successful vaccine.

Today, doctors and drug companies have developed an efficient vaccine against yellow fever, and their cure has saved the lives of untold numbers of people around the world. Each dose of vaccine, though, can be traced back to one original blood sample - that of Asibi.

You might say that one man's blood saved the lives of millions of people.

You can see how this relates to Jesus. The blood of this one man has saved us and millions upon millions of others. In a mysterious way, we have been saved by the death of Jesus through faith in his finished work on the cross. Where do we go from here? Our final week of Lent offers us a reflection of the Journey of Love.

As we enter Holy Week, once again, let us recall the love, the suffering, the dying and the rising of our Saviour; let us do so, first of all, with a humble spirit, and let us open our hearts and listen to what God says.

And secondly, let us enter Holy Week with an open heart, ready to turn away from the things in our lives that grieve God and those around us. Let us take the time to reflect on what kind of relationship we really have with God. Let us recommit ourselves to following Jesus more wisely and closely in everything that we say and do.

And thirdly, as we enter Holy Week, we do so with an attitude of praise and thanksgiving for this act of God. Because of the cross and the resurrection, God has given us the assurance that we have complete pardon for all of our sin.

**“He is no Fool who gives what he cannot keep,
to gain what he cannot lose.” (Jim Elliot)**

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- All Glory, Laud, and Honor # 344
- O Sacred Head, Now Wounded # 351
- Go to Dark Gethsemane # 347

Prayer concerns: *Ingeborg Eidnes, & Matilda Molyneau-Piper, Wess Bourgaize & COVID-19 patients, essential and frontline workers.*

Let us pray:

O God of Enduring Mercy, guide our experience this day and the fullness of the week to come with awareness of the times when we, too, have deserted and betrayed Jesus by turning first to the ways of this world. Grant us the willingness to confess through our thoughts, words, and actions that Jesus Christ IS Lord, to the Glory of You, our God. We ask this through our Savior Christ, Your Holy and Sanctified Son; and the Most Holy Spirit, Your Breath and Wisdom within us; who live and reign with You, One God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Happy Birthday: *Riley Tae*

Wedding Anniversary: *n/a*

IN-PERSON WORSHIP slight adjustment:

1) With the roll-back of the curfew to 21:30 (9:30pm), we will be holding a service on **Maundy Thursday at the usual time of 19:30 (7:30 pm)**.

2) **Good Friday service will be held at the usual time of 11:00 am**. All protocols to be followed, as we were doing last Fall.

3) Similar to what we did on Christmas Eve, we will hold **two services on Easter Sunday**. We will have an **early service at 9:30am** and then the **usual service at 11:00 am**.

Note that we will be gifted at both services with the presence of a wonderful soprano soloist, Léa Weilbrenner!

ATTENTION: Although churches are now permitted to have a maximum of 250 attendees, we will try to keep our **limit to 25** due to the required distancing and the limited space in our church. Please make your reservation for Easter service, in advance, or you may end up sitting in Beck Hall!

To reserve your spot for Easter Sunday, contact **Roger Kenner at 514-487-3162** or send an email to roger@rogerkenner.ca. You must select either 09:30 am or 11:00 am.

Thank your all for your patience. I am looking forward to seeing all of you again. Please pass the good news around.

God bless us all as we reflect on and celebrate the passion of our Lord.
Amen.

March 28, 2021