

Sermon
Good Friday 2024

Today is Act II of the Triduum. Last night in Act I, we shared a meal, we served each other as we washed feet, then we betrayed and denied Jesus as he was arrested and sentenced to death. That betrayal and denial is represented by the emptiness of the sanctuary.

Today we recall the events of last night and follow Jesus on that painful walk to the cross. Tonight we watch as Jesus dies on the cross. And yet, in the midst of that horrific event, in the midst of the agony and bloody sweat, in the midst of death, we believe that by his holy cross he has redeemed the world.

Good Friday reminds us that we all die – even Jesus. Sometimes that death is unexpected, like those who die from violence. Sometimes it's painful and agonizing, like Jesus or like those who suffer from a long illness. Sometimes it's at the hands of a disease or accident that takes a life much too soon. Sometimes it comes after a life well-lived and it's just time. In the words of the funeral anthem, "In the midst of life we are in death."

Knowing about the inevitability of death, however, doesn't make it any less painful. We mourn the loss of a parent or child. We weep at the death of a friend. We are angry at a life lost too soon. We can be hurt to the core when a beloved pet dies. Death has been with us from the beginning of creation, but that doesn't make it any easier.

It is especially difficult when we realize that we had a hand in that death. Oh, we didn't kill Jesus. We weren't the ones to give the execution order, that's on Pilate. And we weren't the ones who drove the nails through his hands and feet, that's on the Roman soldiers. But we most certainly are the ones who cried out for his crucifixion. We most certainly are the ones who denied knowing him. We may not have given the order, and we may not have hammered the nails, but we are complicit. And when we realize that, it makes today that much more difficult.

But in our sorrow, in our grief, in our self-pity for participating in these acts, we cannot stay there. We must be able to admit our guilt, and we must be willing to repent and ask for forgiveness. It's about now that the Confession we've been using in Rite I is particularly relevant:

We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness.
We are heartily sorry for these our misdoings.
The remembrance of them is grievous unto us.
The burden of them is intolerable.
Have mercy upon us.

We need to be willing to ask for forgiveness and we need to be willing to amend our lives.

Only God knows this for sure, but I think that was the difference between Judas and Peter. They were both sorry for what they had done, but it was only Peter who made the effort to ask for forgiveness and was willing to change. Judas remained in his guilt, which led to his suicide.

So on this day when we participate in Christ's death, when we deny him and call for his execution, let us remember not to stay here. Let us have the courage to ask for forgiveness. And let us work to amend our lives so that we may live anew, helping to manifest God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.