

Sermon for Good Friday  
Friday, April 7, 2023  
“God has already been through our worst trials”

Text: Psalm 22; John 18:1 – 19:42

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

We have arrived at the foot of the cross perched high atop Golgotha, the Place of the Skull, Calvary. The scene is the most horrifying scene imaginable. Jesus, having been handed over to the Roman authorities, was tortured, nearly to the point of death. It is said that the Romans subjected criminals to some of the worst punishments imaginable for the time. When Jesus left the Prætorium where he stood before Pontius Pilate, he was sentenced to scourging before his crucifixion. Roman scourging meant being whipped and beaten with whips that had barbs on the end, like claws. Every lash that was meant to tear flesh from the body of the victim. Many who faced scourging did not survive, due to the pain, or the loss of blood, or possibly even from the physical shock. But Jesus endured the pain, he endured the suffering for our sake. He walked through the streets of Jerusalem through crowds of random people in Jerusalem for the Passover festival who were curious to see what was going on, through crowds of his followers weeping and wailing for him, through crowds of onlookers who wanted to see him die. To Calvary, where they would nail him to two wooden planks.

There, they crucified Jesus between two criminals, one on his right and one on his left. They hoisted him up for all to see, for all to pity, for all to fear and know not to cause any trouble. Jesus’s suffering did not end. He faced insults and mocking and testing to save himself, but he remained on the cross, until he was on the very edge of death.

“My God, my God! Why hast thou forsaken me?” “*Eli, Eli! Lema sabachthani?*” Those would be among the last words that Jesus would cry from the Cross. They are the first words of Psalm 22. Borne out of a gut-wrenching anguish, Psalm 22 is the cry of one who knows what it is to be bullied by his enemies, rejected by his community, and abandoned by God. Centuries earlier the psalmist wrote those words. For centuries since, those words were chanted in synagogues and in the Temple. When Jesus cried those words while hanging in despair on the Cross, he wasn’t just asking a simple question of God, he was praying those words of the psalm, and anyone who heard it—any devout Jewish ear—would have understood what he was really saying. Whether the psalmist knew it or not, the verses of Psalm 22 described the fate of one who was to come and declare God’s power. Although we read that Jesus said only the first half of the first verse (up to the asterisk in the Prayer Book Psalter), anyone who heard him would have filled in the remaining 29½ verses and connected everything Jesus had just gone through and was going through right then with those words written centuries before.

“My God, my God! Why hast thou forsaken me?” We Christians often talk about how blessed we are, how loving we should be, how much God loves us, and how much

we love our neighbor, but Good Friday forces us to face the darkness in life, the tragedies that we go through, the hardships we face. Good Friday forces us face our own suffering and the suffering of others and break open the wounds of despair and adversity. Good Friday makes us deal with the disappointment and reality of things that are simply beyond our control. We are made to stare it down, confront it, name it, acknowledge it. Because, if we don't confront our pain and suffering, then we won't be able to stand up to it and deal with it. Jesus Christ endured the most brutal pain and suffering imaginable through his Passion—his painful journey from the Prætorium of Pontius Pilate through the rocky streets of Jerusalem to the splintered wood of the Cross. And he experienced the lowest point of human existence—that is, death. Nothing further could have been done if he hadn't done all that. We can't begin to deal with the pain and suffering in our own lives, unless we first confront it. The psalm reminds us that pain and suffering are inevitable, they are part of the human experience. Good Friday makes us confront it...and stay there.

But Psalm 22 also says in verses 3-4, "Yet you are the Holy One, enthroned on the praises of Israel. Our forefathers put their trust in you; they trusted, and you delivered them." And in verses 9-10. "Yet you are he who took me out of the womb, and kept me safe upon my mother's breast. I have been entrusted to you ever since I was born; you were my God when I was still in my mother's womb." You see, in the midst of all of the despair and anguish, in the face of all those who encircle and surround, who wish to destroy, the psalmist recalls great moments of deliverance and salvation—those times when God just showed up, time and time again. The psalmist deals with tragedy by remembering what God has done and by trusting in God's enduring faithfulness. Through his incarnation in the person of Jesus the Christ, God has already been through all the trials that we have yet to face. When we experience fear and anxiety, suffering and pain, when we go through trials of life, God has already been through it, so, like the psalmist, we must never lose the hope of God's faithfulness. Our forefathers put their trust in him, and so should we.

We often can't explain where our suffering comes from, or why, or why bad things happen to good people, or why disaster strikes, or why people do evil things to other people, or why viruses infect the whole world, but these things do happen. They always have, and they always will. But, Psalm 22 reassures us in verse 27 that God is indeed faithful, that "kingship belongs to the Lord; he rules over the nations." In the end, all power belongs to God. The suffering that we endure today will be met with victory tomorrow. But while that suffering is still part of our present reality, Good Friday reminds us that Christ's passion and death are testimonies of God's presence, even in the midst of deep sorrow; and whenever we feel like all has been lost, this moment reassures us that the Cross will never lose its power.

Sing...The blood that Jesus shed for me.

## Resources

Amanda Benckhuysen, "Commentary on Psalm 22," [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2811](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2811)

Judy Fentress-Williams, "Meditation for Good Friday - April 19, 2019," <https://mailchi.mp/6994fa1cdbe0/a-lenten-meditation-for-maundy-thursday-2612465?e=8e999012ea>