

Good Friday 2020

John 18:1-19:42

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A common Facebook meme that popped up on my page last March was “This is the Lentiest Lent I have ever Lented.” Lent took on a whole new meaning, and the significance of Lent has impacted us in a way that we never anticipated as COVID-19 continues to spread, and we shelter in our homes.

There should be a similar meme for Good Friday, “This Good Friday is the Good Fridayest Good Friday I have ever Good Fridayed.” This Good Friday feels more like Good Friday than any other I have experienced, for I am the one that feels like I have been placed in the tomb, separated from the life I normally live. Except that this one isn’t one day and doesn’t end in three, because it lasts for months- Good March, Good April, and probably Good May. That tomb like feeling pervades my days.

This past week I was home quarantined waiting to see if antibiotics would make me better and if I was negative for COVID-19. Thankfully, I did improve, and the test was negative. Others haven’t been so lucky. Since veterinarians are considered essential, I continue to go to work, but our lobby and exam rooms are void of clients as they wait in their cars. I speak to them through a mask either by phone or through a zoom meeting. My commute time to work is cut in half as the OU campus is eerily empty. I pass locally owned small businesses and restaurants that are shuttered tight and wonder if they will survive. Norman is quieter than normal. The pace less rushed even as patience wears thin. I feel as if I have entered another dimension or another time.

Nothing is the same. Everything has changed. That is exactly what happened on Good Friday. For the disciples, for all of the Mary’s in Jesus’ life, for His human family, for Nicodemus, for Joseph of Arimathea, on that Friday when Jesus was nailed to the cross and laid in the tomb, their world was turned upside down. The man they followed; their friend was dead. They didn’t understand Him when He was alive. Once he was condemned to die, they forgot everything that He had told them about rising again in three days, because of their overwhelming grief and their fear that they would be next. Peter completely denies having anything to do with Jesus three times and is broken by the revelation of what he said. The disciples go into hiding, shuttered away from the people and life that they had enjoyed just a few days before. Nothing was the same. Everything was changed.

The most frequent question I am asked by kids, and sometimes adults too, is, “Why is it called Good when Jesus died on the cross?” We call it Good because we have the advantage of hindsight. It is called Good, because we are resurrection people. Christ’s resurrection is “the light that shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.” It is called Good because His resurrection is our hope and our salvation. In our darkest days, Christ is our light in the darkness, guiding us home and enveloping us with love no matter what or how we have suffered.

But as we shelter-in-place, nothing about these months seems Good, just as the Friday that Jesus was nailed to the cross didn't seem Good for the disciples. Like the disciples, we can feel the oppressive darkness that tries to invade our homes, our thoughts, and our souls. We are scared and frightened of what may happen to us or to our loved ones. We are angry at those in power who abuse their power for personal gain, leaving us to struggle the best we can with the little we have. We are bored out of our ever-loving minds, because we have forgotten how to deal with silence, and how to be with one another without the world to distract us. We are stressed in ways we had never imagined possible. Negativity pervades the very air we are frightened to breathe.

Nothing is the same. Everything has changed. Even church is different. The Eucharistic Feast where we all gathered around Christ's table binding us all together and sustaining us through the week is void from our lives. We are discovering new ways to worship- YouTube, live streamed services, along with several other internet media options. And, some of us are worshipping at home with our family. We are discovering new ways to bind ourselves together across the distances that separate us, and we rely on spiritual communion to get us through the week. Despite all that, I constantly hear how Easter won't be Easter. It is almost as if we think that Easter won't happen if we can't gather together in our church buildings.

Christmas has the Grinch. Easter this year has the Coronavirus. We could write a book entitled, *How the Coronavirus Stole Easter*. However, if you remember the story of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, then you will remember that the Grinch learned that he couldn't stop Christmas from coming, because Christmas isn't tied to the trappings of this world. Neither is Easter. Easter will come, because nothing on this Earth can stop it. Not the Pharisees, not Pilate, not a stone, and certainly not the Coronavirus. Wherever you are, however you choose to worship on that day, Easter comes.

On this Friday, the disciples didn't believe it would come. Their faith was shaken. Their world changed in ways they never dreamed. It is the same for us. But for us, it isn't just one day or three, it is months. Months of praying that we and our loved ones won't be faced with a positive diagnosis. Months of hoping that death will pass over. Months of fear as we wonder if we are next. Months of anxiety, months of our faith being tested, months of waiting to be able to "roll the stone away" so that we can emerge from our homes safely and begin to "live" once again.

Nothing is the same. Everything has changed. Yet, one thing remains constant- Christ's love for us. A love so great that he allowed himself to be nailed to the cross, so that we have the gifts of grace and eternal life. When we finally emerge from our homes, life as we know it will be different, just like it was for the disciples. We will be different. These three Holy Days of Easter- Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter- take on a whole new meaning and impact us in ways that we never thought possible.

Nothing is the same in the world. Everything in the world has changed. However, Christ's love for you, Christ's love for me, and Christ's love for all of God's children is unchanging. His love is the same today as it was yesterday and will be tomorrow. In these dark hours, cling to the hope that Christ brings. Turn your eyes and heart to the light of Christ that shines even from the darkness of a tomb covered by a stone. Trust in Christ's love for you and all of those around you. The darkness will be overcome, because Christ loves you and me so much that He won't be

constrained by anything including death. We are a resurrection people. May the light of Christ fill you with hope. May the light of Christ fill you with love. May the light of Christ fill you with peace, this day and forever more.

Amen