

# Were you there?

## Good Friday

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Psalm 22

Hebrews 10:16-25

John 18:1-19:42

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Every day we stand at a crossroad. Good Friday forces us to face the crossroad we would rather ignore. Having to choose between walking the way of love or following the path of least resistance that prioritizes self-interest over God and others. Holy Week and the Stations of the Cross brings this choice into sharp focus. We stand at a crossroad, Barrabas on one side and Jesus on the other. The choice is ours. When we choose hate, ignore the plight of others, and trample on everyone to get ahead, then we have turned away from Jesus, our actions shouting, "Crucify him!"

In the words of the African American spiritual, "Were you there they crucified my Lord?" Pilate wasn't. He had washed his hands of the whole affair refusing to choose. Judas wasn't for he had betrayed Jesus. Peter wasn't. Peter denied knowing Jesus three times before the cock crowed. The people who were present included the soldiers who were following orders. Those who mocked and scorned Jesus, demanding proof of his divinity. I imagine that there were a few gleeful high priests who thought that the Jesus movement was finally at an end. Little did they know. The only followers of Jesus that stood at the foot of the cross were the women and the disciple described only as the one whom Jesus loved. Despite their own anguish, they endured the taunts, faced their fears, and remained steadfastly present for Jesus as he died upon the cross.

Good Friday has a rawness to it as it forces us to experience Christ's sacrifice. We begin to feel the weight of the beam. The tears of the women become our own tears wetting our cheeks. We are confronted with our own complicity in things that cause harm to others. The grief of our own losses. Our own mortality. We wonder how we can get through every day without those whom we love.

On this day there is no hiding from what we have done and what we haven't done. We must acknowledge when we have refused to choose unconditional love because it is easier to go along

with the crowd. Contemplate those times when we have demanded Jesus prove himself to us. Recognize when we have betrayed or denied Jesus. Consider when we have had the courage to stand steadfast at the foot of the cross even when it means challenging the status quo and the powers that be. There is no escape from the self-examination of our souls and what we find there. Were we there when they crucified our Lord?

Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. We must give careful thought to what his sacrifice means for us. Over two thousand years later we are still receiving all the benefits of his sacrifice. It isn't just new life that we are given, but a lot of other words that we often hear. Words such as mercy. Forgiveness. Peace. Grace. Redemption. Hope. Unconditional love. Even at those times when we choose to walk away from Jesus, his love for us endures. We need to ask ourselves how we have responded to his unconditional love. What have we sacrificed, what are willing to sacrifice for the sake of the Gospel?

You frequently hear the phrase, "This is my cross to bear." But most of the time, people are referring to a burden they must carry which they hate and loathe, not a sacrifice that they are happy to offer to others. The cross that Christ's followers are asked to carry is one of willing sacrifice for the sake of unconditional love for God and His children.

The sacrifices we are called to make are rarely huge dramatic ones, though those can and do happen as evidenced by the many saints who made it onto the liturgical calendar. Most of the sacrifices we make are small, simple things. Yet they are often the ones that cause us the most dismay. They frequently run counter to what our culture would have us do. For example, sacrificing time to spend with God in prayer or to be truly present for others. Sacrificing our selfishness; our constant need to say, "yes," and our belief that we can do it all. Sacrificing our self-righteousness and pre-conceived notions about people and the way things are supposed to be.

Granted, these sacrifices may make us feel like we are dying. In a way we are. We are dying to a life of sin and rising up to a new life of Agape love. We are never so free as when we choose to walk the way of love.

Part of our Good Friday service is called Veneration of the Cross. A large cross is brought in and placed at the base of the altar. It is a poignant reminder of the crossroad at which we stand in our daily lives. We must choose between the way of the cross that leads to new life or the way of the world that leads to sin and death.

I invite you to think about Christ's sacrifice for you. To consider what you have done or haven't done with the love that Christ has given to you. And to ask yourself, what you are called to sacrifice for the sake of the Gospel.

I encourage you to come forward and pour out your heart to God. Lay your pain, your worries, your burdens, and your sins at the foot of the cross. Let Christ free you from those things that bind you. Let Christ's love fill you, giving you new life and courage to walk the way of the love.

May the freedom you find at the foot of the cross fill you with peace.

May the love of Christ which passes understanding make your heart sing even in your sorrows.

As you stand at the crossroad, may you choose to walk the way of love that gives new life to all God's children.

Amen