

# Sermons at St Paul's

Good Friday

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Carroll Anne Sheppard; Licensed Preacher, Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania

*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*

Today is God's Friday. We call it Good Friday to remind ourselves of this important fact. It is the celebration of Love that is so outrageous, so impossible, so beyond human comprehension, that we must bow to God's immortal vision for God's creation to even begin to understand the truth of this celebration. We are loved. Creation is so loved that Jesus died to answer forever the question about who wins. Love wins.

Yes, Jesus died for us. He died not only for the righteous, those who practice justice and try to follow God's commandments. He died for the unjust, the unrighteous, the sinners, the murders and rapists and liars. Jesus died so that sin and death would no longer have power to separate us from God's desire for sharing in God's kingdom here on earth. There is no guilt, no blame, and no shame that can keep us from God's love. Jesus tore down the fence that appeared to stand between us and God's love – in his era and in ours.

We humans like to think well of ourselves, and sometimes we are tempted to think ill of others just to think better of ourselves. We say to each other, "See, you and I do things so well – not like those people, who do not." We compare and judge, making much of small distinctions. We praise our good works and award medals and trophies to those who excel in the narrow contests we devise. Do we even wonder about who does not get to compete? Do we wonder about who is not present? Do we congratulate ourselves that we have successfully excluded our enemies and those we spurn? We do so at our peril.

Jesus died for them, too. Isaiah tells us that he had more in common with them than we may be comfortable hearing: ***"He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account."***

This crucifixion story is deeply unsettling. It is not nice, and it is not pleasant. It is the graphic description of a torture the Romans invented to strip the last vestiges of human dignity from its victims. It is the graphic representation of Rome's power over the lives of people. It is the ultimate idolatry, in which the power of the Empire is extolled by a brutally enforced insistence that Caesar is the Son of God.

Jesus died for the centurions and soldiers present that day. He died for the thieves and pickpockets and for Pilate and the Temple authorities who instigated the crowds to shout for crucifixion. Jesus died for all of us, everywhere, whether we knew him or not. He died to set us free from sin and death, once and for all.

God was present there, on that hill outside Jerusalem. God the Creator, who saw what had happened to God's creation, held God's omnipotence in check while Jesus, God's child, experienced the worst that Evil could perform. Jesus literally gave up God's Spirit on that cross, so that the full brunt and power of Evil could wreak havoc and pain on his battered body. He embraced that suffering to free us, but make no mistake – it was terrible suffering. And at the end, when there was nothing left to give, in Matthew's Gospel we hear Jesus cry out: ***“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”***

Good Friday? God's Friday! He was, as the prophet Isaiah tells us: ***wounded for our transgressions, crushed by our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.***

So let us stop, and consider these words carefully. Jesus' sacrifice is what has made us whole, and “by his bruises we are healed.” We humans are not the same people after that terrible afternoon more than 2,000 years ago. The world changed. Jesus faced the worst that Evil could offer – even unto death. Evil thought it had won for a few empty hours.

His mother and her companions wept. The disciples and apostles were also in agony. The full trauma of the event would mark them all their lives. They, with Jesus, had descended into hell, for they had no foreknowledge that might comfort them. Like the wounded victims of trauma everywhere, they could barely imagine how they were to live another day.

Yet that powerful affliction that makes all trauma sufferers one with Jesus, that marks everyone who knows death, is why this day is a sacred commemoration. This is

why the image of Jesus on the cross has the power it has achieved over the centuries. This day is a commemoration of God's eternal, abiding and living Love. This is God's Friday, when Love won.

The promise of this day so far outweighs the Evil it vanquished that we cannot help but celebrate it. Isaiah tells us: *“When you make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, and prolong his days; through him the will of the Lord shall prosper. Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge.”*

This simple truth changes everything. We, all of us, good, bad, just, unjust, believers and unbelievers, are loved. Jesus came among us to show us a better way to live and what a life pledged to God's love looks like. Jesus showed us and told us what the kingdom of God here on earth could be. And Jesus let go of God the Creator and God the Spirit to become fully human and face the forces of Evil and the worst they could do. He did this so that we who stand on the other side of the Cross could become his offspring and his heirs. We are people who inherit his triumph, prolong his days, and who are invited to make the will of the Lord prosper here on earth. This is why he lived and this is why he died.

And then, his human life over, he was taken down from the cross and wrapped in spices and linen cloths by the friends and family whose hearts were broken. They laid his body in a new tomb, a cave cut into the rock, in the garden alongside the hill of Calvary as the sun was setting. They rolled a stone across the mouth of the narrow tunnel that led inward. They wept as they worked. And their hearts were broken by the pain and degradation that Rome had heaped upon this good, good man, their friend and their brother, Mary's son.

Then because Passover was fast approaching, these faithful and observant Jews, whose ancestors had loved God and followed Moses out of Egypt into a desert trial that lasted forty years, began to wend their way to that annual reminder of God's faithfulness, their Seder dinner.

We are loved past our ability to comprehend. Jesus, our Savior and Redeemer, died for us – all of us -- on God's Friday.

*Amen.*