

**Good Friday  
April 15, 2022**

**In the name of the God of all Creation,  
The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,  
And the power of God known in the Spirit.  
Amen.**

Holy Week and Easter can pose many questions for those who read the Bible from a progressive viewpoint. Did Jesus physically rise in a miraculous resuscitation on the third day after his death? Was the holy temple curtain literally torn in two from top to bottom at the moment Jesus died? Did the whole earth shake, and the rocks split? Were “the Jews” to blame for the death of Jesus as John’s gospel implies? After his death, did the bodies of many dead saints rise up from their tombs and flood Jerusalem appearing to many as Matthew’s gospel proclaims?

Let’s face it, many people like us often come to very different conclusions on these topics than most conservative evangelical and/or fundamentalist Christians do. But one thing that most tend to agree on is that Jesus was executed on what we now call Good Friday.

Jesus was obviously a man of great compassion and conscience. He hated to see the religious institution hijacked by legalistic Pharisees, and he hated the idea that the poor and sick went untended by both the state and church. He thought of himself as one with God, and he believed that he ... and all of us as well ... could harness the eternal Spirit of God for the transformation of ourselves ... and for the world.

Because he was so bold to believe in his prophetic vision, and even more courageous to profess it publicly, he was put to a gruesome and horrific death by the state. The religious institutions saw him as a threat to their power for daring to think for himself, and the government viewed him as a threat for giving the people something bigger to hope for.

As his followers ascribed increasing importance to his ministry, his opponents realized that he had the influence to start a grass roots movement of the people. As it turned out, Jesus became a serious threat to the order of things for daring to share a greater vision.

But then again, is it much different today? There are those around the world who are speaking truth to power and are suffering the ultimate consequence. Journalists, politicians ... and even

clergy ... who are trying to change a system the favors the wealthy over the poor are being silenced ... some jailed ... some poisoned ... some tortured and shot.

But death is not the only consequence of speaking out about one's truth ... social executions still happen every day. Our divisive culture pits neighbor against neighbor, family member against family member, even those sitting next to each other in the pew. The issues of abortion, the rights of LGBTQ persons, climate change, the reform of gun laws, and where we stand on immigration separate us in ways that often feel like existential death.

On this day ... Good Friday ... we can remember a resolute teacher called Jesus, whose life was squashed for daring to express a bigger vision. His bravery, inspiration, and conviction during his life is worthy of exaltation.

We also remember that God was alive in Jesus, and Jesus was alive in God. What Jesus suffered, God suffered. And the suffering God is a God that we can relate to in our own suffering. Just as God was alive in Jesus, and Jesus was alive in God, we, too, are alive in God, and God is alive in each of us. Our suffering is known to God ... not merely as an objective fact ... but as a profoundly experienced spiritual reality.

Today is a day we can very intentionally remember what Jesus was truly about. No matter how we choose to interpret the meaning of Easter Sunday, we still have the unity of Good Friday. This is the day when Jesus willingly paid the ultimate price for daring to transcend the powers of his day for the greater good. He risked his comfort and security to speak progress in a society that was gripping for its life to the sinking sands of creedal security, tribal allegiance, and veneered sanctity. What was true then is true today, and when any one of God's children suffers, God suffers, and we suffer along with God.

I bid you a sacred Good Friday. A day where we can be encouraged to stand up for what's right, come what may. A day to take seriously what Jesus took seriously regardless of the consequences. A day when we see the suffering of our sisters and brothers around the world and in our own neighborhoods as a suffering that God experiences, just as God suffered when Jesus suffered.

Moreover, on Easter Sunday perhaps we can reflect on that moment when a person dares to elevate their mind, heart, and spirit beyond the tribe and become the change they want to see in the world. That is what rising ... resurrection ... can mean. Rising above those who seek to

squelch an awakening for their own comfort or gain. That is what Jesus did. And that is what we all can do as well.

Amen

### **A NOTE ABOUT OUR LITURGY:**

This Good Friday liturgy we are using today is not the liturgy that is in the Book of Common Prayer. There are two major differences. We read the Passion from the Gospel of Luke instead of the designated Passion from the Gospel of John. Secondly, many of the prayers in this liturgy have been rewritten to more aptly reflect the world we live in today.

St. Cyprian's is not alone in using such a liturgy, and a number of churches in the Episcopal Church ... and other Christian denominations ... are offering alternatives to the reading of John's Passion from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

The reason for these changes is that the author of John's gospel uses the term "the Jews" throughout his telling of Jesus' Passion. This has promoted anti-Jewish sentiment ... anti-Semitism ... since it was first written. The Episcopal Church's Standing Committee on Liturgy and Music is even considering changes to the lectionary to address this concern, and the note about the Good Friday liturgy that appears at the end of the worship booklet is a reflection of that.

The real problem is that people have used John's words ... "the Jews" ... to blame ALL Jewish people for the death of Jesus. This has been used to justify anti-Semitism with throughout the ages ... and to do so with the powerful authority of the Holy Scriptures

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First of all, the fact is that Jesus was Jewish ... imbedded in Judaism. He was born Jewish, and he died Jewish.

Secondly, without apologizing for the author of John's gospel, let me share with you some insights from other scholars on this matter. The Gospel of John is the last of the Canonical gospels to be written and was put together in its final form between 90 and 110 of the Common Era ... some sixty to eighty years after the death of Jesus, and some twenty to forty years after the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 CE.

Following the destruction of the Temple, the synagogue became the primary focus of Jewish worship and life. Some synagogues saw the rise of groups called The Way that centered on

Jesus ... his teachings, and his death and resurrection. These were Jewish groups in the synagogue with just a different understanding of Jewish Law and teachings.

However, there were also some synagogues that did not tolerate The Way in their midst. As people tried to understand why God would allow for the destruction of the Temple, they had to have someone ... or some group ... to blame. The scapegoat in some synagogues, and by some synagogue leaders, became those Jews who followed The Way.

The conjecture is that the author of John's gospel came from one of those synagogues that blamed the followers of Jesus for the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. This led to an argument between the author of John's gospel and the synagogue leaders. The use of the term "the Jews" is then seen as referring to the synagogue leaders, not to every Jewish person. In other words, the fight between the author of John's gospel and the synagogue leaders becomes part of the Passion story.

This may be simplistic, and we really have no way to know if it is actually true. Yet the consequences of the use of the term "the Jews" in John's gospel has been used to support anti-Semitism ever since. This is not consistent with the teachings of Jesus, nor the foundational beliefs of the Christian faith, therefore the Good Friday liturgy is being reconsidered so as to tell the story of Jesus' death by crucifixion ... which only the Roman government could order ... in such a way so as to not imply in any way a position of anti-Semitism.

It is my hope and prayer that the powers-that-be in the Episcopal Church ... and other Christian denominations ... will address this issue with a new Good Friday liturgy ... one that both acknowledges Jesus death in the reading of an alternative Passion story, and reflect the deeper core values of our faith in a loving God.

Amen.