



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

Journeying with Jesus Good Friday 422021

I speak to you as a sinner to sinners, as the beloved of God to God's beloved, as one called to bear witness to those called to bear witness. Amen.

Good Friday is about being on a journey. By that I mean Good Friday is about making a journey and by journey I mean something very specific. A journey is not a trip. A trip is where you move to a place and come back and remain unchanged. Journeys are different than trips. Journeys are about a kind of movement from one place to another. Journeys are also not about the destination. What counts is the journey is everything that happens after you leave the front steps of your house. And after you finish your journey at what other destination you find yourself. So journeys are times and opportunities of change.

Good Friday is a journey. Sometimes this journey was seen as a movement that was physical and metaphysical. From our earliest memories of Good Friday, from an account written by a pilgrim named Egeria in 380, we see the journey to Jerusalem to experience, again, Good Friday. And much of what we do today is actually modeled off of that account that was discovered some time in the late medieval times.

So Egeria in 380 made a journey. She made a pilgrimage. She went to Jerusalem because she wanted to be close in both time and space. And in those days to make yourself close in time and space was to, in some ways, travel back in time and to walk with Jesus as he made His way to the Cross. And just as Egeria saw in Jerusalem, so we will in a few minutes, worship a wooden cross and venerate that wooden cross as a kind of stand-in for the Christ who died for us.

So journeys are about movement in time and space. They're metaphysical. And there's a sense in which you and I, by participating in this liturgy, we begin to enter into that first Good Friday. But journeys are also spiritual and moral and internal and even psychological, because whenever we step foot, whenever we move through time and space with any kind of intention, we are invited to experience profound change. And as much as Egeria was making her way to Jerusalem, she was experiencing an inner journey to know herself better as she is known by God.

And this past year, we may not have always been in the midst of a liturgy of Good Friday, but I want to suggest to you that this past year we have been experiencing each of us in our own way, a profound journey. Whether it's come through any kind of disease or death that we've encountered through this pandemic, whether it's come through the heartbreak of living through an unstable political transition, whether it comes from experiencing anew the pain of injustice and racism in this country, whether it comes from recognizing your own fragility in the face of isolation, your own deep need to be with other people, your own sense of loneliness this past year has been an opportunity to experience a profound journey, to experience profound change, to come face to face with your own fragility and your own limits and to see in that pressing up against those obstacles and the reaching of those limits, yourself anew and God anew.

Journeys are humbling. They reveal to us more than we want to know about ourselves. And also journeys are transformative. They help us see ourselves and our world differently. They make us aware of connections that we have overlooked things that we need in our lives, in the same way that we need oxygen.

So Good Friday is a journey and the Gospel of John is one of those moments in which you can see the centrality of the journey that happens when we're with Jesus, as He is betrayed and mocked and crucified, and goes to his death willingly that we might be remade and reborn anew, so that we might be reconciled with God. And in the Gospel of John, we can say that the frame of this entire passion, that we just brilliantly and beautifully sang, the frame of it is a journey.

A couple of chapters before our reading for today, there's a moment in John 14, where Peter says to Jesus, Lord, where are you going? And Jesus says to him, where I'm going, you cannot come. And when Peter persists, he says to Peter that he would deny him three times before the cock crows. And indeed Peter did that because his own journey was entwined with Jesus' journey. And later on in the gospel of John, there's a moment in which Jesus said to His disciples, "I came from the Father and I have come into the world; again, I am leaving the world and going to the Father." By this, Jesus does not mean that He is making a trip, but that He might be seen as making a journey. Jesus is on a journey for us.

And that is the most profound part of the Gospel of John. You see an image of it in the incredible passion we just read where Pilate says to Him, "So you are a king," and Jesus said, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth." So today's gospel is the apex of Jesus' journey. It's the moment in which He speaks about several times in John as the hour for His glory, not the resurrection, not the outcome, but the apex of the journey comes for Jesus when He is hanging on a cross and dying. When He

has given his all, when He is poured out, as we read elsewhere, like an offering on the altar, it's at that moment that Jesus experiences profound change. He tastes death and in tasting death, He also knows what it means to die. In tasting death, He enters into the profound power of resurrection.

So you and I today are called to make a journey with God. You and I are called to somehow close the distance between us, between our own lives and the life of Jesus. And this is liturgically mediated to be a kind of spiritual journey, in which our participation in this veneration of the Cross, our singing and liturgical participation is meant to create some kind of space so that we can know ourselves as somehow there in real time with Jesus at the first Good Friday.

But it's also an invitation to us to think about the journey that is inside of us; the distance that we have covered this past year, the death and disillusionment we've experienced, the shame we might feel, the sadness of loneliness that we struggled against, the boredom of not knowing what to do with ourselves, the restlessness that we have experienced this past year. We have been on a journey for the past year and it's as if, to me at least, that Good Friday gives us an opportunity to see that journey in the face of the journey of Jesus and find in it the witness to truth.

Towards the end of his Epic Baroque poem, the Age of Anxiety, W.H. Auden writes the following: "We would rather be ruined than changed. We would rather die in our dread than climb the cross of the moment and let our illusions die."

This is an invitation to see the cross on good Friday as a kind of journey, an invitation to avoid ruin and to be changed. An invitation to not die in our dread, but to find ourselves in the cross of the moment.

There are three points I want to make today about journeying and Jesus. The first is that the journey of Jesus is one in which God has always come to us. By that I mean, we cannot find our way to God. Our journey cannot be the first step. Our sacrifice will never be enough. Our prayers will never be enough. Our good works will never be enough. We cannot close the distance to God, but God must journey to us, and God comes to us in Christ. And in that journey, Christ is our sacrifice. Christ gives Himself. Christ's love is supreme. And the good news of that Gospel of Jesus Christ is not that you and I have done anything, but that Christ has done everything.

The second point I want you to see is the journey with Jesus is a journey with God. We will never find our way back to being worthy of Christ. We will never find our way to some kind of height of spiritual maturity, where we will no longer need Christ. We will always be in need of the grace of Christ. And that willingness to rely on Jesus means that each of us is on a journey with God, for by dying for us, Christ is come so He might live in us. And everything that we do

in this world is done with the power of Christ within us. And this is an indication to us of the kind of work you and I have to do because of Good Friday. This is why we've given you the opportunity to let go of something, to surrender a resentment, to engage in forgiveness, to let go of something that has been holding you by the tail and to let God do the work inside of you.

Because when we forgive it's because Christ is forgiving through us and we are just going with the grain of Jesus' forgiveness. And when we love, it's not that we have somehow found our way to some greater way to flex our love muscle. It's that Christ is living inside of us and His love is pouring through us. And when we let go of a resentment, it's not that we are somehow able to get the distance we have because so many of us, the last thing we're going to give up is that delight and wonder of being able to say, I told you so, but when we give up a resentment, we let go of our control over people, including ourselves, and we experience liberation.

And the final thing I want to say is that this is a journey we make together. By that, I mean that one of the things we learn when we're on journeys is how much we need each other. How much our faith is truly corporate, how much our faith in Jesus is not just a solitary decision because the decision was first Jesus. We love, it says in 1 John, because He loved us first. But being loved by Christ, we now are invited to love all who Christ loves and to see in them our salvation.

Years ago, I was a chaplain at a children's hospital in inner city Washington, DC. And for reasons that are complicated, I was invited to help a single mother let go of her child who was dying. She had been struggling with addiction. She was struggling with homelessness. The child was born with incredible sickness and it was time to let go of the life support and to trust God. For reasons that I will never fully understand, when I walked into the room at 24 years old, she said, you're going to help me. You're going to help me let go of my son.

I wrote a poem about it because it seems to convey the challenge of journeying with Christ and journeying with each other. The title of it is Gary.

Holding the lifeless boy, I tell his mother he is beautiful
His large hands promised greatness
The mention of which is a mystery, but with it, peace enters the room
Unfulfilled promises better remembered than none at all
His tiny body deceptively heavy, wiggling makes living things lighter
Cold to the touch, the warmth has left his blanket
Dressed in blue, his body lovingly washed
Nurtured from day one, loved from the beginning
She loves him to the end
You will help me let him go, she said
But when I arrive it is too late
I cradle his body

Dead to the world, He is alive to God
And in that moment, my own life leaves me