

Good Friday

Pitt Street Uniting Church, 19 April, 2019

A Contemporary Reflection by Rev Dr Margaret Mayman

Year C

This reflection can be viewed on You Tube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7c3upMmFvsY>

Welcome, everyone, to Good Friday Worship at Pitt St Uniting Church. And a particularly warm welcome to visitors who have joined us for this service. Wherever you are on your life's journey, you are welcome here.

The cross stands before us, shrouded in bark, echoing our church's focus in Lent on the unveiling that is necessary for growth and new life.

On Good Friday, the focus turns to a tree that became a cross.

The cross is a story of how "the powers that be" seek to diminish God's activity in the world.

In Jesus' death on the cross, we see the Divine entering into the suffering of the world... transforming it in unimaginable ways.

REFLECTION *What makes this day good?*

If you have ever believed that love inevitably leads to betrayal, this day says it doesn't.

If you have ever believed that some people are unlovable, irredeemable, this day says they aren't.

If you have ever believed that there is a limit to forgiveness, this day says there isn't.

If you have ever believed you aren't worth saving, this day says you are.

If you have ever believed that you don't deserve freedom, this day says you do.

If you have ever believed that fear, anger, hate and despair will always win, this day says they won't.

And this day is good for you.

READING: JESUS BEFORE PILATE Luke 23:1-5

Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate. They began to accuse him, saying, *'We found this man subverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and claiming to be the Messiah, a king.'* Then Pilate asked him, *'Are you the king of the Jews?'* Jesus answered, *'You say so.'* Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, *'I find no basis for an accusation against him.'* But they were insistent and said, *'He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to Jerusalem.'*

REFLECTION *Power and peace*

What was it about Jesus that was so confusing for governments and for ordinary people? Pilate couldn't make sense of Jesus and much of the time we can't either.

Often, we want a God who will come in might and power to take down all before him - and yet we get Jesus: unmistakably human and vulnerable, trouble-maker, peace-lover, political subversive, always on the side of love, not on the side of coercive or violent power. Human, like us, even to the point of death.

We keep asking the question, *'God, who are you?'* We ask this question in the hope that, sometime, we'll get a different answer.

Yet God just keeps coming back with this one, this Jesus.

READING: JESUS BEFORE HEROD Luke 23:6-12

When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. And when he learned that he was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him off to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had been wanting to see him for a long time, because he had heard about him and was hoping to see him perform some miracle. He questioned him at some length, but Jesus gave him no answer.

The chief priests and the scribes stood by, accusing him vehemently. So, Herod with his soldiers treated Jesus with contempt and mocked him; put an elegant robe on him, and sent him back to Pilate. That day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies.

REFLECTION *Non-violent resistance*

I wonder, Jesus, what it took for you not to back down. You could have changed your mind at any time, answered the questions differently. Pilate wanted you to go free. The judge was on your side. Were you crazy?

But it seems you knew that to deny who you were in front of Pilate would mean turning your back on all those who had discovered freedom and wholeness through the way you had lived your life.

It would destroy all the love they had encountered.

It would mean turning away from the God who named you as beloved.

So you knew you had no choice.

READING: JESUS SENTENCED TO DEATH Luke 23: 13-32

Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people, and said to them, *'You brought this person before me as someone who incites people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for any charge against him arising from your allegations. Neither has Herod, for Jesus has been sent back to us. Obviously, he has done nothing to deserve death. Therefore, I will punish Jesus, but then I will release him.'*

Then they all shouted out together, *'Away with this fellow! Release Barabbas for us!'* (This was a man who had been put in prison for an insurrection that had taken place in the city, and for murder.) Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again; but they kept shouting, *'Crucify, crucify him!'* A third time he said to them, *'Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death; I will therefore have him flogged and then release him.'* But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified; and their voices prevailed. So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted. He released the man they asked for, the one who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder, and he handed Jesus over as they wished.

As they led him away, they seized Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross behind Jesus. A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him...

Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him.

MUSIC FOR REFLECTION *Be Still*

The Fray

Be still and know that I'm with you
Be still and know that I am here
Be still and know that I'm with you
Be still, be still, and know

And when you go through the valley
And the shadow comes down from the
hill
If morning never comes to be
Be still, be still, be still

When darkness comes upon you
And colours you with fear and shame
Be still and know that I'm with you
And I will say your name

If you forget the way to go
And lose where you came from
If no one is standing beside you
Be still and know I am,

If terror falls upon your bed
And sleep no longer comes
Remember all the words I said
Be still, be still, and know

Be still and know that I'm with you
Be still and know I am

READING: JESUS IS CRUCIFIED Luke 23:33-43

When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, *'Abba, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.'* And they divided his clothing, rolling dice for them.

The people stood there watching. The rulers, however, jeered him and said, *"He saved others, let him save himself—if he really is the Messiah of God, the Chosen One!"* The soldiers also mocked him. They served Jesus sour wine and said, *"If you really are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"* There was an inscription above Jesus that read, *"This is the King of the Jews."*

One of the criminals who were hanged there insulted Jesus, too, saying, *'Are you really the Messiah? Then save yourself—and us!'*

But the other answered the first with a rebuke: *"Don't you even fear God? We are only paying the price for what we have done, but this one has done nothing wrong."* Then he said, *'Jesus, remember me when you come into your glory.'*

Jesus replied, *'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.'*

REFLECTION *Saving love*

The criminal who was hanging next to Jesus said, *'Are you not the Messiah, Jesus? Save yourself and us.'*

But this is how you save us, Jesus: by never giving up on love; by not betraying the people on either side of you; by not even trying to escape the hardness of our world, but by putting yourself right in the middle of it.

You save us by making every choice, every moment, every word one of love, not judgement.

So this is how you save us, Jesus: You show us that the worst thing that can happen is not to die, the worst thing that can happen is to give up on love.

READING: THE DEATH OF JESUS Luke 23:44-49

It was now about noon, and darkness fell on the whole land until three in the afternoon, because of an eclipse of the sun. Then the curtain of the sanctuary was torn in two, and Jesus uttered a loud cry and said, *'Abba, into your hands I commend my spirit.'*

Saying this, he breathed his last. The centurion who saw what had taken place glorified God, saying, *"Certainly this one was innocent."* When the crowds that had gathered for the spectacle saw what had happened, they returned home, beating their breasts and weeping.

All the acquaintances of Jesus and the women who had come with him from Galilee, stood at a distance, looking on.

REFLECTION *Searching for meaning*

The meaning of the crucifixion has filled thousands of books over many centuries.

As I come again to this Good Friday, I cannot believe that Jesus died as a sacrifice to God, to atone for the sins of humanity, for such a God is not the God that Jesus' life revealed.

The crucifixion didn't cleanse us of our sin. It wasn't what God needed to forgive us. Crucifixion is what happens when humanity goes astray, and we try to control each other. Crucifixion is what happens when we separate ourselves from the one in whom we live and move and have our being.

The crucifixion happens over and over again when we are lost in our incompleteness, our brokenness, our alienation, lost from the truth that we are one.

The crucifixion is what happens when some people are given more worth than others, when we turn our backs on the inherent worth and dignity of all living things, when we bypass justice, equity, equality and compassion and try to live on the energy that is generated by anger, fear and hostility. When the ties that bind us to each other are cut and we are alone, separate; that is crucifixion.

And still, here is the paradox of Good Friday, sometimes it is in the brokenness and the alienation and loss that we come closest to the sacred, when we see most clearly what it is that really matters and what our individual spirits and the spirit of humanity are yearning for.

Sometimes in our suffering the curtain is torn, and we see those larger truths that have eluded us.

Jesus replaced the myth of redemptive violence with the truth of redemptive suffering. He showed us on the cross how to hold the pain rather than pass it on to others around us.

Jesus' death shows us, once and for all, that God knows what it is to be in the depths of pain and despair and isolation; that God knows whatever hell we face before us.

So today we pray for ourselves, and the hells we live in, for the people that we know and love who are living in a hell. For the people who we do not know, whose hell is conveniently out of sight. For all God's people, we pray for God's comfort, for God's company, for ourselves and for others and for this beautiful world that we inhabit.

Jesus died, not for our sins, but to show us the way to be the embodiment of the Love of God.

The powers of darkness will have their day. But the cries of the crucified will not go unheeded. Christ will come again and again. Christ is embodied now, in all those who work for peace and for justice, for grace and love.

So now we will stand and watch as Jesus is taken down from the cross. Today, we have not denied or run away. Today we stand with Jesus' friends, at a distance, looking on, but wrought with compassion...wondering how we can care for this broken and wounded God, wondering how there can ever be life in the midst of this pain.

READING: THE BURIAL OF JESUS Luke 23: 50-56

There was a member of the Sanhedrin named Joseph, who, though a member of the council, had not consented to their action. Joseph was from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and lived in anticipation of the reign of God. He approached Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Joseph took the body down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb cut out of rock, where no one had yet been laid.

It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. The women who accompanied Jesus from Galilee followed, saw the tomb and watched as the body was placed in it. Then they went home to prepare spices and ointments. But they rested on the Sabbath according to the Law.

MUSIC FOR REFLECTION *All is not lost*

SENDING OUT

All is not lost, is not lost...

May the seeds of peace be scattered

Birthing trees whose shade gives us rest.

There may still be much we need to bury: our hope that God will rescue us by taking us away from the world, not by entering into this one and changing it; the idea that God will magically fix the world instead of our living faithfully to change it.

But this is where the story ends today. And while it's a dark space in which to end, there's comfort in that:

God knows darkness, just as we do.

So go into the uneasy peace of this Good Friday, and may the suffering God who never stops living the way of peace, be your comfort and your company until we meet again.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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- Reflection "Searching for Meaning" written by Margaret Mayman