

Good Friday April 15 2022 The Cross of Death.

See Scripture Readings for GF 2022

A couple of weeks ago I gave a tour of our Glenwood Church sanctuary to the young Beaver group that meets here on Monday evenings. The purpose of this tour was so that these young children ages 5-7 would get to know more about their community. We walked through the Christian Education building, saw the offices, the Sunday School rooms and nursery and then we eventually made our way into the sanctuary.

One of the things I asked them to do is to count the crosses they saw. One little fellow noticed something right away and said there is no Jesus on the cross. I knew that several of the children were from a Roman Catholic tradition and so after the other children told me there were a lot of crosses in the sanctuary we talked about what the cross meant. Whether Jesus is on the cross or the cross is empty.

As Christians around the world gather on this Good Friday there will be a lot of time set aside in hearing Jesus' passion story. This story includes the telling of his arrest, trial, whipping and beating and eventual sentence to death. Capital punishment at that time in Jerusalem was by crucifixion and was administered by Roman rule. This type of punishment was painful and agonizing because the person accused and convicted of a crime would face public humiliation until their death. Often the criminal was beaten, and then forced to carry the crossbeam through the streets to the place above the city where the crosses were placed. The crosses were seen by passersby and above those sentenced to die the written explanation of their crime was placed. When the time came, the sentenced one was tied or nailed to a large wooden beam, hoisted in the air and left to hang until eventual death from exhaustion and asphyxiation.

This is what Jesus endured that day for us as he was nailed to a cross and lifted high for all to see. But why is the most common symbol of Christianity a cross when the cross was where those accused of crimes were killed. Yet as Christians we need to remember something else- Jesus died on the cross but God was the One who oversaw the events and the Spirit moved amongst everyone who witnesses the death just as the Spirit is moving amongst us as we remember.

In many churches, you will see an empty cross. This reminds us that Jesus lives. In spite of those who continue to challenge the historical evidence, there was a man named Jesus of Nazareth. His existence caused the change in the world history based upon the estimated year

of his birth, his life, death and resurrection. These events focused on Jesus, have not been stopped, changed or equaled since. We live in 2022 A.D. anno domini in the year of the Lord.

The empty cross also reminds us that Jesus died. He was fully human and felt pain, rejection, betrayal, hunger, thirst and grief. Jesus also experienced love, joy, companionship, hope, compassion, laughter and growth. Jesus did not just grow old and fade into human history. He made history. His life's work was finished. He stuck to the message laid out for him by God the Father. He kept the same gang around him all the time he was in ministry. Jesus was seen as a threat to the spiritual leaders of his time as he shared his message in the temple. He was arrested for treason. Through his trial he never gave up who he was and was convicted and sentenced to die.

When we look at the empty cross we are also reminded of how Jesus died. The torture before and during the crucifixion were brutal- bones were not broken ut were pulled out of joints and then the arms would bear the weight of the body and muscles were torn. Heat caused the sweat to mix with dripping blood. And he could not wipe it away. Open wounds were clear targets for flies buzzing and biting. Each breath was a torturous push and pull of the arms and body upon the nails holding him at an unnatural angle against which the back would be rubbed raw. This was not done in private- but public for the amusement of those walking by and who would rejoice in the humiliation and loss of life. Nothing was pretty or majestic about the cross that day. It was filled with blood, sweat and a man who was dying.

Once death occurred, Jesus was buried under traditional rites. His body was cleaned and wrapped up and prepared with spices. Guards were posted outside the tomb and a huge boulder rolled into place to block the entry. Jesus did not climb down off the cross but he died and was buried in the manner and tradition of that day.

The empty cross reminds us that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ the Promised One of God who could not be stopped even by experiencing human death. Jesus was dead and laid to rest until after the Sabbath had ended. Jesus' conquered death, and the symbol of the cross gives us hope beyond the tomb. The cross is empty because Jesus is no longer dead, or buried but is living eternally. And this is the hope we as Christians carry in our hearts throughout our lives—Jesus was crucified, and buried but as he told his disciples I will be back.

The empty cross is filled with hope- but are we hopeful? Do we understand the need to be hopeful today? Lamentations 3:21-23 reminds us of our need for hope in God. "Yet this I call

to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."

We need to have hope for our world is changing and is in need of the One who will bring about peace. Jesus is the source of our hope. If we believe in him, we have nothing to fear for he fulfilled his purpose when he said, "It is finished."

Where is your hope? And how do you see the cross in his moment? A symbol where death happens, where life is made possible or where lives change because God is creating all things new? God's grace was given to you through Jesus the Son who died for you. Does his death mean something to you? Or is what he experienced as an agonizing death mean nothing?

As we worship and remember this Good Friday, let us ask ourselves how much does God love you? Let us keep steadfast in our faith that when we look at the empty cross we must give thanks to God for his gift of grace given in Jesus Christ. Let us pray:

God your grace is experienced in the Gift of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Help us to look to the cross for hope in these trying times, in moments of joy and in all those in between times. Your love calls us to renew our faith and to believe. Hear our prayers in this time of SILENCE>
AMEN>