

## **Good Friday Year B -RCL**

**Isaiah 52:13 -- 53:12**

**Hebrews 10:16-25**

**John 18:1 – 19:42**

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

The Rev. Dr. Robert Voyle, an Anglican priest from New Zealand, says we are sometimes tempted to misunderstand God's overwhelming love for us on this special day. You see, if in our hearts, we call this Bad Friday, we are succumbing to a story of evil triumphing over God, and that's wrong.

Yes, as we listen to the story of Jesus' passion and death on the cross, we hear a story full of evidence of human betrayal, weakness, violence and cruelty. But we must understand that those are elements of the story, and not the story itself. This is not the story of death. This is about trust in God's overwhelming love that pours itself out so that no one will have to die as a scapegoat or sacrifice to God ever, ever again. God is putting a stop to that. This is our celebration of the profound mystery of life and the cost of a wondrous love.

Perhaps this year, more than many, with so much economic stress and political uncertainty around us, we hear the voices of temptation – might it *really be* “Bad Friday”? If we hear the voices that suggest that evil may win after all, we are experiencing temptations to change our relationship of trust with God. Please don't misunderstand me here. Temptation is part of human life. But sometimes temptation can lead to sin, if we do not strive to conquer it with prayer and healing.

Some of us may secretly relish hearing about the lethal violence described in this gospel. We may become tempted to wallow in the blood and suffering, as did the movie

The Passion of the Christ. If we get stuck there, we are being tempted by what some reviewers called *carnography* – a new word that focuses on fascination with violence and bodily suffering as being similar to the disordered relationship to others that the word *pornography* describes.

Or perhaps we are tempted by hatred, to take inner satisfaction in experiencing it in relation to some person or group. If so, we may get stuck in the sinful urge that moves humans to harm or kill others, by word or deed. And thus we may fall into the sin of pride, which substitutes our will for the will of God.

Yet another reaction to Jesus' death may happen if we have ever experienced abandonment. We may feel terror this evening or tomorrow as we realize that Jesus is in the tomb, and no longer with us as he was. Are we abandoned? If we get stuck there, we may lose our way. We are then in danger of mistrusting God, so that we turn away from the promise of Easter and distort our relationship with our Creator.

Perhaps others of us, if we have experienced traumatic grief in our lives, may be tempted to re-experience that grief in harmful ways when we hear the gospel today. If we get stuck in the grief, we may also fall prey to the sin of despair, which is no longer believing that we can be loved by God. Grief like that is an evil temptation.

If any of these “Bad Friday” temptations are sources of fear or a heavy burden for you, I urge you to speak with Cliff or Nancy, in deepest confidence of God's love. Having temptations is only to be human, to experience the forces of evil that work hard to separate us from the love of God. Sometimes those temptations can seem overwhelming. The sin is to turn away from God, and not to ask for God's help through prayer or help through healing professionals.

And this is exactly why Jesus came among us – to change that equation forever. Jesus freely offered his human life as an act of redemption. If you wonder about it, turn to pages 848 and 849 in our Prayer Book, and read that redemption is “the act of God which sets us free from the power of evil, sin and death.”

Ironically, there is another temptation – 180 degrees opposite to these. Because traumatic grief, hatred, lethal violence and feelings of total abandonment are such tragic experiences, we may fall into another error – and refuse to engage with their milder and very common human forms. Perhaps we want to skip hearing the whole story of Jesus’ suffering and death, because we only like the happy parts. If we do, we miss the point.

Jesus was human, too. Grief is a healing and natural process that all of us experience. We hear in the gospels that Jesus wept for his friend Lazarus. Rightful anger is what made Jesus throw the moneychangers out of the Temple. We may well feel hatred for actions that cause suffering, without ever denying that God’s grace may intervene and change wrong-doing into reconciliation and forgiveness. And all of us feel abandoned at some stage in our lives. Jesus, in the midst of physical death on the cross, cried out to God through a haze of pain and weakness about his sense of abandonment. It was part of the sacrifice he willingly made. He really did die – as deeply in love with his heavenly Father as he lived

Two thousand years later, we are blessed to know the rest of the story. We know that Jesus has promised that he will be with us always, including at the moment of our own physical death. We will never be truly abandoned. The gift of faith will show us the way to God.

And we know that after the time in the tomb, as he said he would, Jesus was raised by God into a resurrection life –the reality of which we can scarcely imagine, so full of God’s glory is it. Grief will have its night, but the bright gift of hope will shine its light into Easter Morning.

Hatred and lethal violence may stun and wound us, even unto death. Faith and hope may flicker and waver, but love never dies. Love will blaze through the darkest part of our human experience, triumphant. Anyone who has heard or seen Archbishop Desmond Tutu describe the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s work in South Africa can testify to love’s power to heal and transform. The power of love is the power of peace-making, of God’s kingdom on earth.

This is why we call this day, Good Friday. This is why we walk the path of Jesus’ passion and death: so that we may never forget the story of God’s eternal, changeless love for God’s creation. So we may remember with care, all that we know of the day that God offered God’s own self, in Jesus, to set us free from the power of evil, sin and death.

You see, it is so simple, so mysterious, and so wondrous.

God is love.

*Amen.*