

Good Friday 30 Mar 2018 9am Service

[Isaiah 52:13-53:12 ; Psalm 22 ; Hebrews 10:16-25 ; John 18:1-19:42](#) Vanderbilt
Lectionary

[Good Friday March 30, 2018](#) Textweek

Suffering and death. They devastate us. And because they are so devastating, we try not to think about them. But whenever we do, we are afraid.

It's difficult to reconstruct the circumstances surrounding Jesus' death but all the evidence we have points to one thing – Jesus' willingness not to resist suffering and death. In fact, the opposite seems to be true. He allowed them to happen. He accepted them.

Each of the four evangelists has this element in their passion narrative, but John has it more than the others.

From early on in this Gospel, part of which we've just heard, we can tell that Jesus knows what's going to happen, and that it involves suffering and death.

Jesus says to Peter, 'The cup that the Father has given me, surely I must drink it?' At the beginning of the Supper, the writer says that Jesus knew the hour had come, and that the Father had entrusted everything to him. And shortly before he dies, Jesus says that everything is now completed, finished, accomplished.

All this is important for us to remember, today. Because it's what we need to know, if we are to believe in the resurrection – the victory over the power of suffering and death.

We say that Jesus suffered and died for us. This doesn't mean Jesus suffered and died instead of us, so that we mightn't have to go through it ourselves. It means that Jesus suffered and died so that we might see how suffering and death can be overcome.

And he gives us the answer by his own example. Which is that suffering and death can be overcome, not being fought against, but by being accepted.

It would be wrong to assume this meant we don't continue to do all in our power to eliminate and alleviate suffering, eradicate disease, and maintain quality of life

for as long as we can. These remain priorities for us. But it does mean that we overcome the power suffering and death can have over us by taking them to ourselves, accepting their implications for us, and nullifying their capacity to destroy the meaning and value of our lives. That is, we don't overcome suffering and death by railing against them, allowing ourselves to be consumed by bitterness and anger, blaming ourselves, blaming others, blaming God for letting it happen, and then blaming God some more for not doing anything about it.

As it was with the Christ, we overcome suffering and death by accepting their full force, and then by transforming them within us by love, for ourselves and for others, so that what could have destroyed us becomes what gives us new life, and a new way of seeing, a new way of appreciating, and a new depth of loving.

In this sense, we can say that the suffering and death of Jesus saves us.

Not by saving us from having to go through suffering and death, but by showing us how it's possible to suffer and to die with the same expectation that through it all we will experience a new understanding of the power of love to transform, a new dimension to living, a new life, a resurrection from what could diminish us to what could ennoble us.

So we give thanks today that Jesus allowed himself to be destroyed so that we can understand how our own destruction can be the opportunity for a new awareness of the joy of living.

What about miracles, we might say? What happened to them?

The Gospels are full of them. How come God doesn't save us by miracles, so we don't have to go through suffering and death at all?

But the New Testament's warning against dependence on miraculous signs needs to be taken seriously.

'Come down from the cross, and we will believe,' challenged the onlookers, a challenge that was not taken up, because this is not the way God works.

Whenever we look at the accounts of the miracles, we need to ask the question, 'What exactly was the miraculousness of these miracles?'

And the answer is that the miraculousness of the miracles was that, through faith, people found life in their affliction, and were able to transform suffering and

death from something that diminished and devastated them, and deprived them of hope, into something that transformed them with new perspectives, new hope, and new life.

What healed them was their faith, we are reminded in the Gospels, countless times. It was their faith that allowed them to accept their suffering and see in it the potential for life, not death, and to rejoice.

Good Friday reminds us, once again, that it's by accepting our own suffering and death with the serenity, graciousness and faith in God that the Christ so clearly demonstrated, that the destroying force of suffering and death can be overcome, and transformed into a new life, a resurrection life, a life united to that loving God to whom we give our thanks and praise, today and always. Amen.

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