

**Good Friday – April 18, 2025**  
Luke 22:14 – 23:56

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Life, death, and resurrection. As I said last night, that is what these Three Days are about. And tonight we come to death, and the cross. We have spent some time in this season of Lent here at Grace considering the cross in our Sunday morning educational hour. We used a curriculum called “Making Sense of the Cross” in which we reviewed three of the main ways the church has tried to understand and explain the cross over two millennia. Why does Jesus have to die? What good does it do? How on earth can this help us in our own lives?

What is hard for us, though, after 2000 of proclaiming the cross and displaying it in and on our church buildings, on our clothing and our bumpers, or wearing it on chains around our necks, is appreciating how shocking, how unexpected, how utterly mind-boggling and counterintuitive the whole event of the cross truly is. It is simply not how we imagine the almighty creator of the universe dealing with a creation gone awry. It is certainly not how things work in our experience of the world. It is not how the powerful in this world deal with those they have power over.

But therein lies the key to this event, I think. In allowing the powers of sin, death, and evil to do their worst to him, and by *not* allowing that to be the end of the story, God in Jesus Christ undoes their power. Because their power lies in fear, fear of pain, fear of humiliation, fear of death. Having taken on our nature and our lot, as last night’s ancient eucharistic prayer puts it, Jesus was not immune to that fear. He was not a robot, nor was he merely God in a human suit. He was truly human, and felt all that we feel. But he endured that fear and then he endured all that it threatened, and through it all, his main concern was not for himself, but for others. Sin, death, and evil did not succeed in turning him inward, looking to strike a bargain with them to save his own skin. Their threats, their humiliation, their torture and murder were ultimately rendered utterly impotent.

But that’s jumping to the end of the story, and we’re not there yet. Tonight we linger at the cross, facing its horrible reality, and seeing how it is already being undone by Jesus’ faithfulness. Take note of how that plays out in Luke’s passion account that we turn to in a few minutes. At the Passover meal with his disciples Jesus connects himself to them through the bread and the wine. After the meal he laments what *they* will have to endure as they witness his suffering. One of them will deny him, to save his own skin. One will betray him, have lost faith in him, and the rest will abandon him. Just as he prays that he might be spared what is to come, he also prays that they might be spared from their own time of trial. To the women weeping for him on his way to Golgotha he expresses a concern for their own future in what he knows is coming for Jerusalem. Then, *as he is being crucified*, he prays to the Father to forgive those who are doing this to him! That’s followed by that familiar scene of Jesus between the two criminals, which only occurs here in Luke. It’s so familiar that we might miss the almost ironic humor of this situation. “Today you will be with me in paradise,” he says to the one who asks to be remembered when he comes into his kingdom. How utterly pathetic these two dying men are making plans for the future. The text doesn’t say that they were laughed at at this point, but you can easily imagine it, can’t you? Finally there is Jesus, turning to his Father, and entrusting himself into his care. He dies uncorrupted by sin and evil, though for the moment it seems that death at least has secured its victory.

One more observation about the cross in Luke’s Gospel. I want us to see how it picks up the theme from Luke’s first chapter, where God’s great reversal is announced in the pregnancy of Elizabeth, John the Baptist’s mother, and in the Magnificat sung at Mary and Elizabeth’s

visitation. In the cross we see God's project of turning the world upside down, of casting the mighty from their thrones and lifting up the lowly, resulting in something we could not have expected. *God* is included in that great reversal. In this remarkable and surprising project, the almighty God has cast down God's own self from the heavenly throne, emptying God's self of divine prerogative, as we heard on Sunday in that famous passage from Philippians, and going where no god has gone before – to humiliation, rejection, suffering, and death, so that we lowly ones might be lifted up. God takes on our sin and our death, fully owns them, fully embodies them, and bears their consequences for us and for our salvation.

One of the conclusions of our Lenten study was that however we make sense of Jesus' crucifixion in the abstract, the cross is more than an abstraction, more than a theoretical construct, more than an idea that we can hold at arm's length and scratch our chins about. The cross, we claim, is a singular event that changes the world, God's unexpected, unfathomable, powerful work on our behalf and on behalf of the whole world, an event that transcends history and geography and reaches into the hearts of people of every time and place to transform them, turning them to God and to one another, freed to live without fear in the face of whatever this world throws at us, and filled with compassion for those whom Jesus died to save. May it be so for each of us. And may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our eyes on the cross, and our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.