

LENTEN SERIES 2019
SEVEN DAYS TO GLORY: Holy Week
First Presbyterian Church
Week 4—“God’s Friday”

INTRODUCTION

In this Lenten Series, we will explore the particulars of each day during what we know as “Holy Week”—the seven days to Easter following Jesus’ Palm Sunday entry into Jerusalem. The writer follows the chronology as recorded in Mark’s gospel.

This week we will explore Friday (a.k.a. Good Friday) ...

Scripture:

Psalm 22:1-11

Mark 15:16-41

WHY IS GOD’S FRIDAY CALLED “GOOD?”

Through the passage of time, people have often wondered, why is *Good Friday* “good”?

- ✦ One theory is that the term “Good Friday”
 - may originate from Germany,
 - where the German words used for the day are translated as “God’s Friday.”
 - And, over the years, it has been altered in the English language to become “Good Friday.”
- ✦ And, like the author of the study, I agree that the day of the cross can be considered “good” because it is surely God’s (*God’s Friday*) ...
 - because it’s all about God and what God accomplished—
 - for it was the day that God acted through God’s divine power
 - to bridge the chasm between God’s goodness and love and humanity’s separation and sin.

And, perhaps no amount of words can capture the completeness of the event that is God’s “Good Friday”—

- ✦ a day filled with ugliness and violence
- ✦ that ends with the glory of God being set loose in the world—
- ✦ no amount of words can capture this day except for one—**love**.
 - As in “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:16-17—*both verses*—because you can’t have v.16 without v.17!).
 - Love—God’s love made real in the person Jesus—
 - God’s love that bridged the divide between God and his creation—
 - that *love* is the basis for the good news,
 - and it is the basis for “Good Friday.”

JESUS' FINAL HOURS

This week's Mark passage is another long account that includes all the crucifixion details—the description of the final fateful hours, from 6:00 in the morning until 3:00 in the afternoon. As the earliest of the four gospels, Mark's account offers a concise and powerful report of Jesus' death.

The entire 15th chapter of Mark actually divides the last day of Jesus' life into four specific time periods—6:00am (daybreak), 9:00am, 12:00 noon, and 3:00pm.

6:00—9:00am

- ✦ At daybreak, the Jewish leaders
 - formed a plan,
 - bound Jesus,
 - led him away,
 - and turned him over to Pilate.
 - Pilate questions him about being the “King of the Jews.”
 - Pilate attempts to have the crowd request to release Jesus, but the Jewish leaders had stirred them up to have Barabbas released instead.
 - The irony is that Barabbas was actually a member of an armed resistance group, while Jesus was much more peaceful in nature.
- ✦ Jesus is led away
 - to be mocked,
 - tortured,
 - and beaten
 - before being led out to be crucified.
 - According to Roman custom, Jesus is made to carry the crossbeam of the cross (the vertical post would have already been planted in the ground on Golgotha)
 - Ultimately, he is too weak to carry the crossbeam,
 - and Simon of Cyrene was forced to carry the cross
 - to Golgotha—the *Skull Place*—
 - named for the skull-shaped rock that jutted out from the cliffs outside the old city wall of Jerusalem.

9:00am—Noon

- ✦ At 9:00am Jesus is placed on the cross (v.25), and his long, slow death continues.
 - Roman soldiers and Jewish onlookers continue to mock him.
 - He is mocked in the formal charge against him and placed on the cross,
 - “King of the Jews”—
 - Romans dealt violently with those whom they regarded as a threat to Caesar (there is not king but Caesar).
 - And, he is mocked by insults and taunts of the onlookers.

Noon—3:00pm

- ✦ The whole earth was dark (v.33—“darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon”).
 - All seemed lost—the great dreams of Jesus’ kingdom of God evaporated
 - Perhaps barely a whisper from the crowd, as people wondered what was happening.
 - In the ancient Near East, cosmological signs were thought to accompany the death of great persons.
 - Mark’s original readers would likely have known the story that the sun had grown dark when Julius Caesar died as well.

3:00pm and after

- ✦ At 3:00pm the silence is broken by Jesus himself.
 - Jesus cried out with a loud shout, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?”
 - which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”—Psalm 22.
 - This psalm held great meaning for the Jewish people
 - It tells the story
 - of one who had suffered under a foreign power
 - who had come to a dark place where even the sense of God’s presence had disappeared
 - it is also the description of the *suffering servant*
 - After being offered sour wine, Jesus let out a loud cry and died.
 - In Mark’s gospel, Jesus remains silent throughout the entire crucifixion ordeal until he cries out from the cross.
- ✦ Then, according to Mark’s gospel, two important things happened immediately after Jesus’ death:
 - First, the **curtain of the temple was torn in two** from top to bottom—
 - Signifying that God’s presence was no longer separated from the world.
 - The temple curtain had marked the space in the Holy of Holies reserved for God’s presence.
 - It’s tearing in two means God is loose in the world—there is no longer a separation between God and humanity.
 - The chasm has been closed forever.
 - Secondly, **the Roman centurion** (the commander of the execution squad) surprisingly said, after seeing how Jesus died, “Truly this man was God’s Son.”
 - This is the first time in Mark’s gospel that a human affirms Jesus as the Son of God—
 - and it wasn’t a disciple, a family member, or any other Jewish person.
 - It was from a high-ranking Roman soldier—a Gentile.
 - The title he applies to Jesus is the same one Caesar claims as his own

BACK TO THE BEGINNING

There are many theories and theologies that attempt to explain the cross and what happened at Golgotha. But, perhaps no one theory is sufficient, and no amount of words can capture the completeness of the event that is “God’s Friday”—except for one—**love**. “For God so loved the world ...”

- As in “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:16-17—*both verses*—because you can’t have v.16 without v.17!).
- Love—God’s love made real in the person Jesus—
 - God’s love that bridged the divide between God and his creation—
 - that *love* is the basis for the good news,
 - and it is the basis for “Good Friday”—for *God’s Friday*

In Jesus’ death, God reveals that *love* is more powerful than any earthly power or constraint.

As we continue our Lenten journey this year, and we find ourselves more and more contemplating the cross and looking upon the face of the crucified Jesus,

- let us remember that we are looking into the face of God,
- who loved the world so much that he gave his only Son—
- not to condemn, but to save!