

## Wesley United Methodist Church

April 19, 2019

"Reflections."

John 19:1-42

As followers of Jesus, we need to embrace Good Friday, which is a little bit like saying we need to embrace torture. In the Gospel of Matthew 16:21-25, we are told, *"From that time on, Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and rebuked him. 'Never, Lord!' he said. 'This shall never happen to you!' Jesus turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God but the things of men.'*

*Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his Cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.'*

Good Friday is the day we remember the crucifixion of Jesus, but there's more to it than remembering; this event is to call people to the Cross. We want to embrace the resurrection, but Jesus calls us to the Cross, too. How often have we heard, "It's Friday, but Sunday is coming." The point is that Friday is the road to Sunday. There is no Easter Sunday without Good Friday. There is no resurrection without the Cross. Our job as pastors is to tell the truth to Christ's people: There's a Good Friday for all of us.

I realize that we have a problem with the Cross. The very idea of Good Friday causes us concern. The problem is that both his power and wisdom led him to the cross, a brutal denial of everything he has done before. Those who have seen his power wondered why he seemed powerless at his greatest need. Those who saw his intelligence wondered how someone so smart could miscalculate so badly. But come to think of it, both sides missed what Jesus and his Father were saying: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone, but if it dies, it produces many" (John 12:24). Not just his words, his very life is a parable. Jesus knew well in advance what would happen. Betrayal, false accusations, standing alone when he should have been surrounded by friends, beating, torture, pain, having to keep your mouth shut when you're more than able to defend yourself, the sky grows dark, despair, shame, anguish, guilt, hurt, regret, a feeling of uselessness. And believe you me I know if we put our minds to it, we could continue to make that a lengthy Good Friday list. Good Friday will never be as harsh for us as it was for the disciples. We know he was resurrected—they did not.

It wasn't just the people of Jesus' day who had a problem with the Cross. We as a congregation have a problem with the Cross. Religious minded people want miracles and power. Intellectually minded people want wisdom and truth.

What God offers us all is first the Cross. The earliest believers called the Cross "the wisdom of God and power of God" (I Corinthians 1:23-24). This is a stumbling block for us to consider today, that both his power and wisdom led him to the Cross. People prefer not to dwell on such things. After all, who respects suffering? When was the last time you heard about suffering and liked to hear it?

The Good Friday story is worth telling. Because things are always darkest just before they go pitch black. And then, in the blackness of the truth—the truth that our own power and smarts are never enough—we discover that we need to rely on the promises of God. Good Friday also provides the opportunity to proclaim, "Once you've been to the Cross, everything changes." Stumbling blocks and foolishness turn into power and wisdom. The Cross changes everything. If something's pursuing you, then perhaps the event that will change everything for you is the Cross. If nothing is changing, maybe you haven't been to the Cross. Easter is indeed about the empty tomb. But first it's about the Cross.

Why are we in such a hurry to rush Jesus up to heaven? Is it because the Cross doesn't fit into our picture of how things ought to be? It didn't fit into anyone's picture back then, either. Friday is the road to Sunday. It was the road for Jesus; it is the road for us.

We have to be honest with ourselves. Can we say, "God promises never to forsake us," but it doesn't always feel that way, right? Here are two phrases Jesus uttered on the Cross: "Why have you forsaken me?" and "Father into your hands I commend my spirit." How can those two go together? Even at his death, Jesus showed us how to trust the Father beyond the circumstances.

Jesus predicted his death and resurrection. It's one thing to predict the future. It's quite another to go to the Cross willingly. At least three times, Jesus shared his destiny with the disciples. They didn't understand. More challenging still is the fact that Jesus embraced this destiny by faith. He knew the Father's promise of resurrection, but death still lay ahead of him. And death was still death, even for Jesus. It was his trust in the Father's promise that caused him to wager

everything he had, his very life. As a man, Jesus modeled how to trust the Father. There is no such thing as a resurrection without death. There is no such thing as an Easter without Good Friday.