



Sermon for Good Friday
Rev. Jonathan Stepp
April 19, 2019
John 18:1-19:42

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

Here's the problem I've always had with Good Friday: I don't really know what to do. Our prayers, our readings from scripture, and even the way in which we strip our altars bare, all speak to the profound and stunning tragedy of humanity trying to kill the God who loves us. But what am I to do with that? Fast? Pray all day? What if, instead of the day's devotions causing me to feel grief or repentance they only leave me feeling numb or tired? Have I failed in some way? And what if all this talk of injustice, torture, and death just leaves me feeling depressed? Have I missed the point in some way?

Good Friday began to be a lot more meaningful to me personally a few years ago when I focused my thoughts that day on one simple line from today's Gospel reading. It is the moment when Pilate brings Jesus before the crowds after Jesus has been beaten, whipped, and had the crown of thorns placed on his head. And Pilate says simply to the crowd – and therefore to all of us – “Behold the man!”

In Latin that phrase was rendered “ecce homo!” And it became the inspiration for over a thousand years of Christian art as generation after generation heard and meditated on those words. I believe they tell us what we are called to do on Good Friday. We are called to look at Jesus and not look away. That is all – and that is everything.

I say “that is all” because I don't think God is trying to guilt us into feeling, or thinking, or doing anything that we don't naturally feel, or think, or do in response to these events. God is not an abusive and manipulative parent who's trying to provoke some reaction from us. On this day, when Christ by his death set us free from death – on this day which we call Good Friday – we are above all else free. Free to feel what we feel, think what we think, and do what we want or need to do.

I say that beholding the man Jesus is everything, though, because it is everything that God does require of us on this day. God asks of us that we pause, that we turn away from the normal day-to-day struggle of life, and behold what amazing love, what amazing grace, what amazing compassion has been revealed to us. That the heart of God is not violence, but suffering; the heart of God is not anger, but kindness; the heart of God is not judgment, but mercy.

Behold the man. That is all. And it is enough.