



GOOD FRIDAY

A Sermon by Rev. Marci Glass

April 15, 2022

Psalm 130

John 18 and 19



LAST NIGHT, WE HEARD OF THE NEW COMMANDMENT JESUS GAVE to his disciples as he fed them and washed their feet as a servant would.

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Tonight, after hearing this heartbreaking story of betrayal and political scheming and violence and humiliation and death, we are left to go out into the darkness of the night and wait.

The love of the new commandment is hard to remember tonight after that story we just heard.

Sunday is coming, a famous preacher once said about Easter, but it isn't here yet.

We are left, tonight, with death. And with the reminder of betrayal—by Judas, by religious leaders, by the crowd, even Peter, who denies Jesus 3 times.

Tonight, it seems our hopes for salvation is lying buried in a tomb.

Good Friday is only *good* for us because we know that what we can see now—*this death we see all around us*—will not be victorious. But even that good news doesn't erase the reality of death from our lives.

Our world has experienced lots of death recently. Six million deaths from Covid globally, almost a million of them in this country alone. Disruption of school, careers, life. Devastating climate and ecological news. War and rumors of war.

No wonder we're anxious and exhausted.

I want to move right through this time and wake up tomorrow in a less stressful and easier world, to wave a magic wand and be on the other side of this.

But I know that things take time. Israel wandered 40 years in the wilderness, right?

And while I intellectually understand that things take time, it doesn't seem to matter emotionally. It takes energy and patience to stay in the muck and the mire of life.

Many holy weeks ago, a friend of mine pointed out there is a similarity between *burying something* and *planting something*. He asked if a seed could know the intention of the sower— does the seed trust it's being planted, and not buried, when it is placed deep in the soil and covered up, hidden from the light, the air, the sounds of the world? Does it matter? It's in the ground either way. Buried. Planted. Separated from what we see and know of life.

Jesus, after his entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, when told by his disciples that people from other countries are there to see him, replies with, *“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain. If it dies, it bears much fruit.”* (12:23-24)

It is from death, burial, planting, that new life is able to bear much fruit.

Which isn't to say mourning and grief are to be cast off and forgotten as we race to new life. We cannot move headlong toward the next thing, the new life, the fruit that will be born. Time makes demands of us. We must wait.

If we planted seeds today, if we buried them in dirt, would we expect to see a 4-foot-tall sunflower spring up overnight?

It takes time for new life to emerge, time when we can bear each other's burdens and prayer concerns as we wait and watch, as we water and tend the soil, as we love each other as Jesus loved us. That is our work in the waiting time—to see ourselves and each other as having been planted, and not buried. We love each other and tend to each other the way Liz takes care of the orchids out in the hallway.

Death and time are companions. Good Friday is our reminder that death and time journey together at a pace that is not the one we would choose.

I am also reminded that when we experience new life, it has likely been a long time in the making. A “new artist” was being interviewed on the radio once, asked about how it felt to be a rising star with the release of their first single.

They replied with an answer that suggested they had not forgotten all of the years of practice,
music lessons,
school band concerts,
of touring, playing in dark pool halls and county grange dances,
of rejection from record labels.

Just because they were a new artist to the interviewer, didn't mean they hadn't been actively preparing and working for this new life.

Are we willing to wait for new life with active intention and preparation? Are we willing to see being buried as being planted?

Everybody but Jesus in this story seems to be in a hurry for something. The religious leaders and the crowd want to be rid of this meddlesome Jesus. Pilate is trying to wash his hands of the scenario as quickly as possible. Peter shows up first with a sword, quick to use violence, and by the end of the night, he appears ready to deny Jesus as many times as it takes to just get through the night and get out of there.

Jesus seems to understand, in ways that no other character in the story does, that death and time journey together at a different pace than we would choose.

Jesus gives us instructions for the waiting time, he told us to love one another as he loved us, even as it means death and loss and pain.

And so we return to his words:

‘I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.’

In John's gospel, how did Jesus love us?

Sacrificially.

He loved us all the way to death. And beyond.

This is the kind of love that takes our time, our effort, our nurturing. It's the kind of love the world needs to see.

Jesus offered us the gift of loving us with his entire life. And it is that to which we are called with his new commandment.

Sunday's a coming, friends. But we aren't there yet. As the psalmist said,
I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in God's word I hope;

While we wait for Easter, we are left to show the world, through *our* lives, how it is we claim that Good Friday is good. Whether you see it as being buried or planted, may you trust God is your companion through it, and will bring you to a new life you can't quite see from here.