

Good Friday, 18 April 2014, Hickory Neck Episcopal Church
The Reverend Henry P. McQueen
Isa 52:13-53:12; Ps 22; Heb 4:14-16, 5:7-9; John 18:1-19:42

S.D.G.

Let us pray,

Lord our God, who by these words from the cross dost speak unto our souls; let it come to us now with assurance and in the might of thy Spirit, that we may see in Christ crucified thy power and wisdom, and the revelation of thine infinite love. Amen

“For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried.”

Jesus, God Incarnate has died!

The altar is bare, the adornments are gone and the mourners are dressed in black. The usually color filled church has become a black and white portrait of death.

Jesus is gone, and we feel as though we have been left alone.

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Several years ago, at the height of one our many recent wars, I had the opportunity to sit with a Chaplain assigned to a combat unit. Having heard other military chaplains speak of their tours, he told similar stories. He talked about not carrying a weapon in a combat zone. He talked about the fear expressed by the soldiers who were ready to give up their lives to protect him. He talked about the challenges to his faith.

And then he got quiet and his eyes filled with emotion. He said what scared him the most, and it scares him to this day, was that he was in places where he could not sense God's presence. The Chaplain said that he didn't know if he could not sense God's presence, or if God was not there. Either alternative was frightening to him.

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

The emptiness that we sense with the death of a loved one can make us feel like this, God is not there for us. The stories and images of man's inhumanity to man on the

news can make us wonder, where is God? Our own anger towards God can exacerbate the feeling. And here we are, on that day when Jesus is gone and all is dark, a day when we when we might struggle to sense God's presence, is God not here?

Looking at the Passion of our Lord more carefully we find that Jesus is both exhibiting control and submitting to God's will. Jesus asks Peter, "Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?" Jesus follows God's will.

With very few words, Jesus controls the conversation with Pilate telling him that Pilate's power exists only because God granted him the power. While Jesus hung from the cross He made assurances that his mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, would be cared for. And then Jesus at last relinquishes all control and turns it over to God as he says "it is finished."

This was all possible because God was present and in control.

On Palm Sunday we heard Matthew's Passion narrative; when Jesus breathed his last Matthew tells us "At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom." The curtain separated the temple area from the Holy of Holies - God's dwelling place here on earth. Only God would have been able to tear the curtain from top to bottom.

Even in our darkest moments God is present and in control. The dark is turned to light. Death is conquered and life eternal reigns; even when we don't necessarily feel it, we are an Easter people. Though we often struggle to stay in control, the best happens when we turn our life over to God. "It is finished."

Amen