

YEAR B, GOOD FRIDAY (RCL)
Isaiah 52:13-53:12, Psalm 22, Hebrews 10:16-25, John 18:1-19:42

Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there when they nailed him to the tree? Were you there when they pierced him in the side? Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?

In a few minutes we will sing that deeply moving hymn. But what odd questions these are. None of us were there more than two thousand years ago for the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ – the day that Jesus was tried, was sentenced and was executed. It is a ridiculous, preposterous, nonsensical proposition.

Still, for Christians, the words from this cherished hymn invoke a deep, gut wrenching, heart-rending response. It can take us to a place of deepest sorrow, a place so forlorn, a situation so anguished, that it feels like our hearts may really break in two. It is a place we hopefully don't go to very often. It can be almost unbearable.

How can that be, when it is physically impossible for us to have been there on that Good Friday so very long ago? Maybe it is because we were there – right there at the very foot of the cross.

It is much more than a reaction to the inhumanity of the torture and suffering inflicted on Jesus that day. Many others were crucified as Jesus was.

In the history of the church, many martyrs and others less well known, suffered tortuous deaths. And in our own times, horrific, unthinkable suffering still happens. No, there is something personal about the passion of our Lord that reaches us at such a deep level. We **were** there when they crucified our Lord. Or rather, it is more like we **are** there, as Jesus is condemned and crucified. But I'm afraid it gets much worse – we start to sense not just that Jesus was crucified **for** us – but that he was crucified **by** us.

John's telling of the passion of our Lord is quite different from that in the other gospels. Jesus here speaks very little from the cross. He says, "I am thirsty". He says, "It is finished". And only one other thing. As Jesus looks down from the agony of the cross, he saw his mother, standing with the disciple whom he loved. And he tells his mother, "Woman, here is your son". And to the disciple, "Here is your mother". For Jesus, the relationship of parents to children, and the notion of family, has nothing to do biology, marriage or heredity. Our family, our primal relationship, is between us and God, and between each other. To most of us, it is instinctive to love and care for our children, our parents and our families. For those we love, we give them all that we have, enduring much, even being willing to sacrifice ourselves on their behalf. And that is good. Love is the very center of a meaningful life, and the key to unlock the beauty and fullness of life that was always God's hope and longing for us from the beginning of time. But it is our tragic human failing, that our capacity for such love is limited to an inner few. In God's world, such love is universal. The mother of Jesus is

every bit as much, the mother of the disciple. And the disciple is the son of Jesus' mother, just as much as Jesus himself was.

From the perspective of God, it is a shabby self-delusion to claim that we have no direct relationship with Jesus. We relate to Jesus every time we interact with each other. You may recall this story told by Jesus in Matthew's gospel.

"Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.'

Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?'

And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' Then he will say to those at his left hand, "You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared

for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care

of you? Then he will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me."

Time and time again, in our ignorance, in our pride, or in our arrogance, we reject loving each other as God has loved us. And every time we do, we are standing at the foot of the cross. In our daily choices to not love each other as God loves us, **we** are the ones who shout **crucify him! Crucify him!**

So now what? We may recognize that we are often in opposition to God in our lives. We **were** there when they crucified our Lord. We were there when they nailed him to the tree. We were there when they pierced him in the side. And we were there when they laid Jesus in the tomb. The good news, and the important part, is that Jesus was there too. We cannot fix what it is that we have broken. We cannot restore what we have taken from others. And we cannot heal all the wounds that we have inflicted. Jesus can. Jesus did. And Jesus will. Always and forever. Isaiah laid it out for us. Jesus bore our infirmities, and carried our afflictions. Jesus was wounded for our transgressions, and crushed by our iniquities. Christ was crucified for us. But it is by his wounds, we are healed. It is only through the saving act of Jesus this day on Calvary's cross, that we have been redeemed. In Jesus' unique act of perfect obedience and sacrifice, we are freed from spending our whole lives agonizing at the foot of the cross. We are released from an eternity of condemnation for our sins. And in this perfect and complete atonement by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the distance and the estrangement that we have put between ourselves and God,

can melt away. We can be the close and beloved children of God that we were meant to be. But that is only because of the cross of Christ. Amen.