

The Lessons Appointed for Use on
Good Friday

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Psalm 22

Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9

John 18:1-19:42

They came for him at night. Led by torches and lanterns, the cohort of soldiers and police and priests and religious leaders needed the artificial light to find him. Before the sun would go down again, Jesus would be plunged into the darkness of death, shut inside his very own tomb.

Before he would lie in death, he would be betrayed, interrogated, and abandoned by those closest to him. Before he would rise again three days later, an intense effort would occur to find out who Jesus really is.

Could it be so that this man, Jesus, is the Word of God? The Messiah?

The King of Israel?

Depending on you asked, Jesus represented many things to many people. An insurrectionist possibly. A king to stand up against Rome. A false prophet. The Christ. An innocent man. Whoever he was, Jesus was

to die on that day. He was to die a brutal, horrific death. A death that none of the Gospel writers truly describe, except for the fact he was crucified. A death that we would remember thousands of years later because of what came out of it.

Jesus taught in the light, in public spaces. He was crucified in that same light, the middle of the day- the hottest and brightest it could be of the day. Throughout his Gospel, John explores the interplay of light and darkness in our lives. In Jesus' passion narrative, our senses are awakened as we're drawn into the dark garden awaiting Jesus' fate with him. We're taken to a courtyard, a small charcoal fire burning for warmth, shedding an ominous glow on the proceedings happening inside. As the sun is rising, Pilate moves in and out of his headquarters, in and out of the dawn, as he goes back and forth as to whether to proclaim this innocent man guilty.

Peter, courageously follows Jesus from night to morning, but still very much in his own dark night of the soul as he denies Jesus in the

light- he wasn't willing to fully follow the light quite yet. The moment of crucifixion, the women, the bystanders, those at the cross, casting their eyes up to Jesus, up to the skies, the day, as Jesus predicted, is really happening. And finally, Jesus, bowing his head, giving himself to death, placed inside that tomb where not even a crack of light can touch him. It is finished.

"In many ways, we're taught about enlightenment, rather than endarkenment." Barbara Brown Taylor writes in her memoir *Learning to Walk in the Dark*. Instead of confirming that evil comes in the dark, that the dark is merely for negativity, she explores the beauty in darkness. I could relate when she wrote of growing up, she would turn off the lights to go to bed, a trail of night lights would like the way to every conceivable exit and bathroom. But, today, we mourn in a very dark place. No night lights to light our path. Our grief is real, as Jesus' pain and agony was. What then does it truly mean for us to join Jesus in the darkness of his last day on earth, in the utter darkness of the tomb when

the stone is rolled over the opening? No oxygen to be had, but none needed any more for our Lord. It's stifling the thought of being present with death. Most of us spend our lives ignoring, if not avoiding death.

For the disciples, on this Good Friday, the cross was to be a defeat. All of their hopes, dreams, and visions for a Savior have been crucified. The grave of Jesus held more than just his body. The crucifixion pierces their own hearts as they fled- not able to watch the darkest moment they could imagine happening. But Jesus, God incarnate, chose to walk the darkest way. Jesus was present each and every step of the process. Jesus, while betrayed by Judas, stepped forward to those arresting him. And in his last moments alive, it was Jesus who gave up his spirit. No one took it from him, it was not theirs to take, but for him to give.

When we sit with that, his sacrifice and death on the cross, we find ourselves in an uncomfortable place. We don't know exactly what happens in that atoning act on the cross- the mystery of the incarnation and God's redemption is something to be re-approached and re-thought

and re-meditated over and over until at the last days it is understood once and for all. But that is what we are called to do. To encounter this darkness is to walk with Christ as he chose to walk among us on earth. It can be easier to ask the what, why, how, where, than to just be. It's harrowing to think otherwise.

In the end, the truth that Pilate seeks, the truth we all seek is that Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life. Jesus is the Light of the World. But that truth will have to wait. Because today, we must wait in the darkness. We must be patient for resurrection. There is good happening in this darkness, even if we can't see it through our tears and broken hearts. Because it is through Christ's darkest hours that we find God's ultimate love for us. Wendell Berry wrote, to know the dark, go dark. Go without sight and find that dark, too, blooms and sings. Dwell in Christ's tomb. Be present in the agony and the suffering. Embrace the darkness with boldness as Jesus did. Light will come soon enough, but until then, find what blooms and sings in the dark.