

NOT JUST A MARTYR

Good Friday Meditation

March 25, 2016

Jesus was not just a martyr. Before saying anything else, let me clarify that I am by no means denigrating and/or making light of the tremendous faith, unflappable dedication, heroic courage and passionate integrity of those who have been martyred, killed, for their religious conviction. However, this day we commemorate that Jesus was more than a man dying for a cause or a conviction. Jesus had no desire to be a political martyr. He was not being killed simply because He was challenging "the establishment," or "speaking truth to power", or "confronting corrupt systems." The Bible is clear there was an absolute necessity and a clear purpose for His death; in fact, this is arguably the principle reason He came.

By the way, for those of you knowledgeable about church history, don't confuse the meditation title with the early church father and Christian apologist Justin Martyr.¹ Justin's works represent the earliest surviving Christian apologies. During his entire Christian life, Christianity was an outlaw religion; he wrote lengthy apologies, or defenses, of the faith to the Roman authorities. When he was arrested for his faith in Rome in 165 AD, the prefect asked Justin to denounce his faith by making a sacrifice to the gods. Justin replied, "*No one who is rightly minded turns from true belief to false.*" He was summarily executed.

Some of you will remember the "trick" question I put to the Confirmation Classes every year. "*Can God make a rock so large that even He can't move it?*" Can't the all powerful God do anything He wants? Well, the answer is "No." There are some things that God cannot do. He can not do anything contrary to His nature, His essence, His "God-ness." I know that sounds a little like theological gobbledegook, but God does have limitations, limitations He cannot violate and still retain His characteristic and essential God-ness, His godliness. God can not sin. Plus, the One Who is the embodiment of truth can not lie. The short answer to the question is that He will not, and indeed can not, make such a rock, thus creating something beyond His ultimate control and abdicating His sovereignty. Abdicating His sovereignty would make Him less than God.

The Bible also tells us God is love. Love is the essence of His character. He cannot be unloving and still be God. However, the God who is Love is also the God Who is holy ... pure and sinless, perfect. Purity and perfection by definition cannot be adulterated by contact with the impure, the sinful, the imperfect. So, the impure, sinful people He loves must be provided a way to become pure, if they are to commune with Him ... and so we are told that God so loved the world, that He sent His son.

As finite beings we'll never fully understand the infinite mind of God this side of heaven, but we are told enough to know that this was the only way to reconcile the dilemma. According to Mark, Jesus prayed, "*Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.*" God denied His Son's request in the Garden, because of His holiness and because of his love. There **was** no other way to secure the salvation of His people; so Jesus went on to suffer the consequences of our sin.

Crux is the Latin word for Cross; it is the word from which we derive the English words "crux" and "crucial". There was a time when a person wasn't supposed to mention the word "crux" in polite society. If you were a well-bred Roman in the days of the Roman Empire, the Latin word "crux" was one of those words you just didn't use if you had manners. The crux was used for crucifixion; it had no other purpose. This tortuous and gruesome form of execution just wasn't talked about in respectable company.

In that cultural context Paul wrote, "*God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" Again and again Paul writes "*We preach Christ crucified.*" As if to say, "*I don't care about cultural convention. We MUST talk about the cross!*" For the cross is the crux of the Christian faith. As Isaiah foretold, "*God laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*" Thus providing a way for a holy, loving God to do what He could not otherwise do: embrace His less than holy people, and welcome them into fellowship with Him.

The sad commemoration of Good Friday, this unhappy celebration, serves to remind us that there is One Who is Good ... one Who is good enough to save us, One Who is good enough to cover us with His goodness, the only One Who is good enough to make us good in the sight of a good and gracious God. And that He chose to do so is indeed *good* cause for celebration.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Justin_Martyr

**GREENWOOD COMMUNITY CHURCH, PRESBYTERIAN
805 MAIN AVENUE, WARWICK, RHODE ISLAND**

GOOD FRIDAY SERVICE OF MEDITATION AND WORSHIP

MARCH 25, 2016

1:30 p.m.

*The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord;
She is His new creation by water and the Word:
From heaven He came and sought her to be His holy Bride;
With His own blood He bought her, and for her life He died.*

Samuel J. Stone, 1866

Silent prayer in preparation for worship:

*Almighty God, we beseech Thee graciously to behold this Thy family,
for which our Lord Jesus Christ was contented to be betrayed, and
given up into the hands of wicked men, and to suffer death upon the
cross, who now liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever
one God, world without end, Amen.*

From the Anglican Book of Common Prayer for Good Friday

READING *Luke 23:32-38*

“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

ALMIGHTY GOD, LORD JESUS IS OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS, BUT THIS DAY WE ARE HIS SIN. HE HAS TAKEN UPON HIMSELF WHAT IS OURS, AND HAS GIVEN US WHAT IS HIS. HE HAS TAKEN UPON HIMSELF WHAT HE WAS NOT, AND HAS GIVEN TO US WHAT WE ARE NOT. THROUGH HIS GRACE, WE HAVE A RIGHTEOUSNESS NOT OUR OWN.

***HYMN** *Beneath the Cross of Jesus* 251

READING *Luke 23:39-43*

“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

WE GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THROUGH HIS GRACE WE HAVE THE CERTAIN HOPE OF LIFE, ABUNDANT AND ETERNAL. BECAUSE HE WAS CURSED, WE ARE BLESSED, IN THIS LIFE AND FOREVERMORE.

READING *John 19:23-27*

“Woman, behold your son.” “Behold, your mother.”

IN GRATITUDE FOR THIS GRACE, MAY WE BE DILIGENT TO LOVE THOSE HE WOULD HAVE US LOVE; ATTENTIVE TO THOSE HE ENTRUSTS TO OUR CARE, AND MAY WE SERVE THEIR NEEDS GLADLY, WITH GENEROSITY, SELFLESSNESS AND LOVE.

READING *Matthew 27:45-46*

“My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?”

MAY WE SEE IN THE CROSS THE TRAGIC EXTENT OF OUR SIN. STRENGTHEN AND ENABLE US, O GOD, TO RESIST THE SIREN CALL OF SIN IN EVERY AREA OF OUR LIVES AND ENDEAVOR TO DO AT ALL TIMES WHAT IS PLEASING IN YOUR SIGHT.

READING *John 19:28-29*

“I thirst.”

O GOD; MAY WE EXPERIENCE THE BEATITUDINAL BLESSING PROMISED TO THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS. MAY WE THIRST TO BE HOLY, MAY WE THIRST TO BE LIKE CHRIST, MAY WE THIRST TO BRING HONOR TO HIS SACRED NAME THROUGH OBEDIENCE TO HIS WILL.

SPECIAL MUSIC *Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed?* Stephen Parkinson, Baritone

MEDITATION NOT JUST A MARTYR

***HYMN** *When I Survey The Wondrous Cross* 252

READING *John 19:30*

“It is finished.”

MAY WE HAVE EVERY CONFIDENCE THAT THE WORK OF SALVATION IS INDEED FINISHED. WE THANK YOU, O GOD, FOR THE BLESSED ASSURANCE THAT JESUS HAS TAKEN AWAY OUR SINS, SAVING US FROM THE LAW OF SIN AND DEATH.

READING *Luke 23:46-49*

“Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit!”

AT THE FOOT OF OUR SAVIOR'S CROSS, IT IS WITH HEART AND SOUL WE GRATEFULLY COMMIT OUR LIVES TO YOUR CARE. MAY YOUR FATHERLY HANDS GUIDE US, PROVIDE FOR US AND PROTECT US NOW AND FOREVER. HEAR US AS WE PRAY, AS OUR LORD TAUGHT US TO PRAY: “OUR FATHER, WHO ART IN HEAVEN, HALLOWED BE THY NAME. THY KINGDOM COME, THY WILL BE DONE, ON EARTH, AS IT IS IN HEAVEN. GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD, AND FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES, AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US. AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL, FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM, THE POWER, AND THE GLORY FOREVER, AMEN.”

THE STREPITUS

*The sanctuary will remain open until 3:00 p.m.
When you choose to leave, please do so in worshipful silence*

THE STREPITUS

Occasionally on Maundy Thursday we observe a version of the medieval liturgy called the Tenebrae, or Service of Darkness, in which the candles and lights are gradually extinguished until the congregation sits in darkness ... at which point the Christ candle is carried out, symbolic of Jesus being led out into the night to His trial and crucifixion.

When the Tenebrae is observed on Good Friday, the darkness is also seen as a representation of the darkness which covered the earth at the death of Jesus. In some traditions (as we will observe in our liturgy today) the Good Friday service literally ends with a bang, called the Strepitus (STREP-ee-toose).

Strepitus is Latin for "loud noise", and is signified by the slamming of a book or a door, or even the clashing of a cymbal. The "loud noise" symbolizes the earth shaking and rocks splitting (Matt. 27:51) at Jesus' death, and foreshadows the "violent earthquake" (Matt. 28:2) at the opening of Jesus' tomb on Easter morning.