

Somehow, because Jesus suffered crucifixion, death, dissolution, abandonment and betrayal, we know ours is the God of the emergency room, the welfare office, the hospital ward, the detention centre, the crime scene, the broken family, the broken friendship, and our shattered hearts.

And it's here that we meet our Messiah every bit as much as we encounter the Spirit of God in a stunning sunset, a winding river, a gorgeous garden, and in the riotous laughter of our friends and loved ones.

This is the Good News of Good Friday: God has been and will be in the most awful places in which we find ourselves, even in the places where it seems that God is absent. That's what we can learn when we confront the crucifixion in all of its ugliness and horror.

Jesus' struggles and failure in death is a profound affirmation of our own many struggles and failures in the chaos of our lives.

And it's in the face of our darkest moments that we're granted permission to give ourselves completely over, as Christ did, to the seemingly impossible potential that somehow, in the end, God will draw grace out of heartache and call us to life again.

**Amen!! Thanks be to God!!**

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## *A Message from Rev Mark!* **'Wounded for our Sake'**

**Good Friday - 4th April 2010**

**Scripture: John 18:1 - 19:42**

The prophet Isaiah writes: *"For he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed."* (Isaiah 53:5)

It's pretty lofty stuff, this writing from Isaiah. We're encouraged to believe that Jesus died, and not just died, but was brutally killed for the sake of a greater cause, a greater good. We call this ancient and time-tested understanding the doctrine of the "atonement"; it attempts to make sense out of what is, essentially, a completely senseless situation.

In this way, the ancient teaching seems to be strikingly human. How often we find ourselves attempting to see some semblance of order in the chaos, to find some place of stability on which to stand or to catch a glimpse of freedom in the face of being locked up in a place like this.

We need only to remember, if just for a moment, that the Disciples, witnessing the crucifixion of their teacher and friend almost 2,000 years ago, didn't have the New Testament to read. It's also unlikely, even assuming that they could read, that they'd have been quoting from Isaiah as their would-be Messiah was hanging from the cross.

We so often forget that a critical part of our Good Friday experience is to live, as best we can, as witnesses of the horror and senselessness of the crucifixion.

None of the players in the passion narrative even remotely have things “*figured out.*” The Disciples resort to violence and scatter in panic long before the most important action takes place. Even Pilate, the most powerful figure in the story, finds himself watching over events whirling violently out of control. After his famously cynical remark, “*What is truth?*” we find him chastising Jesus for not recognising the governor's power of life and death over him.

But it's only a few verses later that Pilate realises he can no longer stop the process that has begun. The people are furious; they want blood, and they want it right away. Pilate's power suddenly evaporates; he can only write the inscription for the cross and walk away from the carnage of the day.

Jesus, the man who would be God, is swept up into the hands of soldiers, police, and priests; he is beaten, mocked, and scourged in a way that ought to chill our bones to a degree beyond the awe we might feel at the fulfilment of a scriptural prophecy.

And while the author of John's gospel writes with such an emphasis on symbolism, scriptural fulfilment, and deep meaning, there is no loss of the terror and emptiness of the crucifixion experience - an experience which leaves our Saviour, a victim of institutionalised violence, with only three final words: “*It is finished.*”

We're so much like the Disciples of the story. We want our Messiah to make sense, to rise up over of the powers and principalities, and to rule. We yearn desperately for an end to our human suffering, the many tragedies that touch our lives and our world.

We want a God who is willing to wreak havoc on the bad guys, to arm us with strength over those who would hurt us.

On a good day, we might not want too much pay-back, perhaps, but we at least want complete freedom in knowing that we can't be harmed or held any longer. And, in our strikingly human way, we'll turn to comforting explanations, theologies, and stories to try to make sense of our messy lives.

This is the Messiah we want, the God we think we need; but it is not the God we have. If we dare believe that we can hide behind our vast and lofty explanations and shrug the crucifixion off as something that happened a long time ago to satisfy an old score, we risk losing sight of the importance of this event in our lives.

The truth is that most of us know something of what the crucifixion is about, even if we have only encountered a sliver of the terror that Jesus and his Disciples knew at that particular moment in history. We've all been touched by death and its often-inherent meaninglessness. Even if a death has meaning, there is rarely a lack of sorrow, a sense of incomprehensible loss.

If we've not yet experienced the death of a loved one, we know how often senseless acts intersect and disrupt our lives, our plans for something better for ourselves and for those whom we love. Losing a job, exchanging angry words with a friend or stranger, the break up of a friendship or household, being banged up in here; these are all such inexplicably heartbreaking events, especially when seen against a backdrop of systemic violence that continues to dominate life in our world.

And it's at these points of change, disruption, constraint and confusion that we need the Messiah we have.