

## **Sermon – Good Friday**

At this time of the year, I'm reminded that the full range of human experiences are present in the Easter story. Easter is the celebration of the fulness of life – it's the celebration of birth, growth, hardship and triumph – it's truly the story of birth, death and resurrection. In this Holy week, Christians all around the world gather to share in the Easter mysteries - the relationship between the cross and the eternity of God's love for us.

The great mystic dame Julian of Norwich talked about this same connection when she talked about how she prays to God – in prayer, she describes the trust and the faith that leads her forward when she allows herself to experience the glory of heaven standing behind the suffering of the cross – standing behind the passion of Christ (and his love for us). Behind Christ (behind the cross) we see the glory of heaven.

In a way, Good Friday is the celebration of this passion – in Jesus we see a faith and a love that is truly unbreakable – a love that is unstoppable. The eternity of God's love - present and visible in the world (in human form).

“...they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read 'Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews'...”

As I say every year, it could be argued that Jesus was the victim in this story – a helpless man dragged to his death by evil men – ignorant men – weak men.

But, this just isn't true. Jesus was not without strength and power. He was robbed of his liberty, his clothes and even his life, but Jesus held onto his faith in God and his love for humanity. Yes, faith and love gave him power and he held onto that power even at the end, after everything else was taken. And, that's why we say that this Friday is good.

In a way, I think many people living around us in the world today may well be struggling with their own Good Friday experience. (I'm very mindful of this – for many, this year has been a time of ongoing suffering and trial.)

In other parts of the world, we've heard stories about the devastating effect of the Covid 19 virus – on individuals and on struggling nations. We've heard stories about the strain and stress of this virus on health care workers – we've

heard reports from around the world about overcrowding in hospitals and medical staff working without protective clothing. We've heard stories about fatigue and stress – and a rising mortality rate. These are Good Friday stories.

And, here in Australia, the Covid 19 virus has taken a lot from us (and we've had it easier than most). – In our country, we've heard stories about people robbed of their liberty – sick in hospital or isolated at home. Over the last 12 months, many have felt the full effect of the social distancing measures that were put in place to limit the spread of this virus. We've seen people struggle with feelings of loneliness – cut off from family and friends. (I saw this often, while working away up north.) We've seen people living around us in Perth reaching out for help – struggling with their finances, their sense of well-being and other mental health challenges.)

Here in our parish, we've seen parishioners struggle with sickness, and grief and loss. Yes, in these uncertain times, many have struggled. Again, these are all Good Friday experiences.

Like the Good Friday story, it could be argued that all the sick and the suffering and the grief stricken are victims – victims of the Covid 19 virus, or victims of sickness or victims of grief and loss. But, I think there are other stories that need to be shared in these difficult days – stories about care and compassion that can fill us with renewed hope – stories that celebrate the triumph of the human spirit.

When I hear stories about the heroic work of doctors and nurses working in overcrowded hospitals in other parts of the world – stories about the lives that have been saved – (and stories about shared grief when lives are lost) – when I hear these stories I see evidence of God's grace.

When I hear stories about food delivered to the frail and disadvantaged living in our community – when I hear about these acts of service and genuine concern – I'm reminded that the grace of God has been very active during this last year. As I said during the height of the lockdown last year, government support for the unemployed and mortgage assistance for struggling families – these are all visible signs of a community guided by the grace of God.

Like Jesus, all of these caring people show us the eternity of God's love in human form. As we continue to struggle with the sickness, the suffering and the grief that we see around us, we are reminded today that God's grace endures. Like the passion of Christ on the cross, we are reminded that the love

and care and compassion that we share are visible signs of grace, wrapped up in human flesh. In these difficult days, I pray that we will follow in the footsteps of Dame Julian of Norwich – I pray that we will look through the suffering of the cross to catch a glimpse of the glory of God’s love that stands behind it. May the Lord bless us and guide us in the year ahead.

The Lord be with you.