

First Reading

“Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they’re doing.”(Luke 23:34)

Jesus we come – to walk the road with you – to follow you to the cross. We prepare ourselves now to follow your footprints in the dust. To understand how you died. To understand how we die. To understand how you lived. To understand how we should live.

You forgave even those who took your hands and feet and drove nails into solid wood. Who, straining, lifted up the cross that held you and dropped it into place. You have forgiven them. When we ask for mercy, we are amazed to find that it has already been extended. You have forgiven us.

May we, in turn, forgive. Even before it is asked of us.

Second Reading

“I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.”(Luke 23:43)

Jesus we come – to walk the road with you – to follow you to the cross. We prepare ourselves now to follow your footprints in the dust. To understand how you died. To understand how we die. To understand how you lived. To understand how we should live.

In your darkest hour, you turned to reassure the man beside you – a stranger. You extended eternity to him, even as you died. When we suffer, we find your hand extended to us – we find strength in the life you give us.

May we, in turn, have the strength, even in our darkest hour, to turn to the stranger suffering beside us and extend your life to them.

Third Reading

“Dear woman, here is your son.”(John 19:26)

Jesus we come – to walk the road with you – to follow you to the cross. We prepare ourselves now to follow your footprints in the dust. To understand how you died. To understand how we die. To understand how you lived. To understand how we should live.

You turned, in your suffering, to care for those who cared for you. You turned those you loved toward each other, and asked them to give each other the status of family. You have called us your sisters, your brothers.

May we, in turn, turn to those you love, to your church, and give them the status of family.

Fourth Reading

“My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”(Mark 15:34)

Jesus we come – to walk the road with you – to follow you to the cross. We prepare ourselves now to follow your footprints in the dust. To understand how you died. To understand how we die. To understand how you lived. To understand how we should live.

You were abandoned by God, alone in your suffering. You withstood what we could not, and promised to never leave or forsake us.

May we, in turn, be faithful to those around us, walking with friends and strangers through their suffering.

Fifth Reading

“I am thirsty.”(John 19:28)

Jesus we come – to walk the road with you – to follow you to the cross. We prepare ourselves now to follow your footprints in the dust. To understand how you died. To understand how we die. To understand how you lived. To understand how we should live.

You were fully human – thirsty as you hung there, in the hot sun. You felt the urgent need of a parched throat and a dry tongue. You have quenched our thirst with your living water.

May we, in turn, choose to quench the physical thirst of others. May we, in turn, choose to quench the spiritual thirst of others.

Sixth Reading

“It is finished!”(John 19:30)

Jesus we come – to walk the road with you – to follow you to the cross. We prepare ourselves now to follow your footprints in the dust. To understand how you died. To understand how we die. To understand how you lived. To understand how we should live.

You finished the work you came into the world to complete. You completed, and will complete, the world in which you came to work. You have completed and will complete your work in us.

May we, in turn, have the opportunity to join you in this completion. To take up your work, and to pull the yoke with you as our partner.

Seventh Reading

“Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands!”(Luke 23:46)

Jesus we come – to walk the road with you – to follow you to the cross. We prepare ourselves now to follow your footprints in the dust. To understand how you died. To understand how we die. To understand how you lived. To understand how we should live.

After all. After everything. After the pain, the rejection, the sorrow – you entrusted your spirit to your heavenly father. Although you felt the forsakenness of sin in its fullest, you trusted your father. Now you entrust *us* to your heavenly Father – sitting at his right hand, and interceding for us.

May we, in turn, trust. May we learn the extent of your faithfulness. May we trust ourselves to you.

Jesus we come – to walk the road with you – to follow you to the cross. We prepare ourselves now to follow your footprints in the dust. To understand how you died. To understand how we die. To understand how you lived. To understand how we should live.

You consented to take on human weakness, being born as a baby. You healed the sick, gave hope to the poor, and freed the captives. You suffered sickness, and pain, and oppression. You were arrested. You were beaten. You were nailed to a cross. And you died. But then.

Oh but then.

After a long, dark wait – light conquered darkness.

Sermon

What do we say at this point, when the seven last words of Jesus have been spoken? What else might we add to these verses, these hymns of lament, these prayers of sorrow? At once, there's nothing and everything yet to say.

Perhaps the shortest Good Friday sermon ever written was given by a legendary Roman Catholic priest who stood before his congregation and offered two simple words: He's dead. In light of this, that our sins and passions and anger snuffed out the light of the world, that our angst and rage put to death the one that gave us life, what else can we say? He's dead, and those words weigh heavy not just in the air, and not even just on our shoulders, but deep within our souls. What else can we say, but Jesus died?

Fortunately for us, we're privileged readers. We know tonight is not the end of the story, that these seven last

words of Jesus aren't really his last words, just the last ones before he rises. There's an entire segment of scripture devoted to what happened next, what we see in the resurrection. So there's many words yet to say, it seems. Through death, we find life.

But what we can't do, what we mustn't do, is speed through these last words and ignore the reality of God's death here on this instrument of torture. We can't ignore the pain of the cross for Jesus, or the Father, or the Spirit. For eternity, these three have been together, constantly and continuously creating all that is good across the universe. They've literally never been without one another. And the depth of our sin, of our pride, is that we so think that we know better than God that we put Jesus to death when we've decided he's not the kind of king that we wanted. He's not the savior we thought he'd be. Even if he's the savior we need, he's not always the savior we want, so we

crucify him on the crossroads of our false knowledge and our imperfect desires.

Nor can we ignore the emptiness of the cosmos when her Creator falls prey to the awful, deadly arrogance of the creations. The one who once filled the space between the atoms and the time beyond eternity is now strangely absent, not because Jesus wanted to leave, but because we kicked him out. How the universe didn't fall apart, we may never know. But what we do know is that there's a strange emptiness on this Good Friday.

And what makes it good, anyway? What is the good news in the midst of this? Where do we get the gall to call this, of all days, a good day? As Danielle Shroyer said, "If we killed God, and life came through that, then there is nothing left to fear." What's good about this day is that we don't get what we deserve. What's good about this day is that, even in this deepest of darkness, we know there was a

sunrise. What's good about this day is that this is the very height of our sin. We've convicted Jesus of a crime he of course did not commit, and put him to death when, in fact, we were the ones who deserve such a punishment. But God never forces this on us. Even through our most magnificent of sins, God's passion for life cannot be dissuaded. God's commitment to creation won't be stamped out by even this, our most fantastic rebellion.

And we know this tonight because compassion oozes out of every last word of Jesus. Yes, we're guilty, and we hear "Father, forgive them for they just don't know what they're doing." Yes, we deserve hell, and yet we're promised presence with God in paradise. Yes, we may feel alone, but here's your new family. Yes, we may feel forsaken at many times, but we hear even Jesus knows what that feels like. Yes, our bodies fail at the weight of the world, and we hear that even Jesus thirsts. We witness the result of our

sin, and feel like it will never end, and yet Jesus declares, "It is finished." We feel like the consequences, the finality of this, can't be avoided, and yet Jesus commends himself into the care of the Father, so that nothing but nothing can kill him forever.

Why is this a Good Friday? Because we killed God, and life came through that. There is nothing left to fear. Amen.