

# ὁ λόγος παρακλήσεως: Good Friday (15 April 2022)

St. Thomas', Glassboro

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## **Collect**

Almighty God, we pray you graciously to behold this your family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed, and given into the hands of sinners, and to suffer death upon the cross; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Isaiah 52:13-53:12, Hebrews 10:16-25, John 18:1-19:42, Psalm 22

## **I. Death Changes Things**

I often try to begin sermons by highlighting something odd. Something unusual. Something that might even challenge our settled view of the world, upset our equilibrium just a little. Because it's in that little bit of movement, that little space, that new possibilities arise.

But the disciples' equilibrium was more than a little upset. The cross was a huge problem. On the cross the disciples had just lost everything they had been counting on. Their hopes for a Messiah. Their expectations for what God was going to do in their lives. Their friend, Jesus. It was all demolished in a moment and this little community was in shock. What now?

Death changes things.

All the hopes and aspirations and expectations they had. The trust and confidence Jesus had been building in them. Their growing understandings of God and the world and themselves. It had all just been nailed to the cross and now it was lost to them. The cross was a giant spike that had just been wedged into their world and used to pry them apart, demolishing them utterly. All they had left were a bunch of pieces that had once seemed right. What are they to do with them now?

Death changes things.

## **II. Our own experiences of death**

Death changes things – not just for the disciples, but for us, too.

We have all lost people we love to death and experienced the wrenching changes that come with that. If you were close to that person then you may have reached for your phone to call them. Or thought about asking their advice. Or wished you could just be near them. And then you remembered: things aren't they way they used to be. Death changes things.

And it's not always physical death that changes things, is it? Maybe it's the death of a relationship, like when a marriage fails or some kind of estrangement happens. Maybe it's even a good thing like when your best friend gets married and suddenly doesn't have nearly as much time for you as she used to have. Maybe it's your child who moved off to college or got a job in a different time zone. Maybe it's your own opportunity to experience life on a different continent. Sometimes even really great things can happen to us, and still they involve loss. And every loss is like a little death. And death changes things.

### **III. Death is Where God Works**

The crucifixion of Jesus was no accident. It took a while for Jesus' friends to figure that out. John's Gospel, from which we heard the Passion today, is thought to have been written after all the other Gospels. It is the only Gospel which is super clear about Jesus' crucifixion as a mysterious kind of victory, an enthronement of sorts. It's something Jesus meant to do. Jesus was not the unwilling victim, instead he acted with agency and purpose. Because Jesus knew something.

Jesus knew that death changes things. And Jesus knew that the name of the change-agent, the one who is able to do redemptive good even in death, is God.

In our first reading, we read Isaiah's tale of the suffering servant. That suffering was the path to strength and victory, and very specifically that suffering was the path toward health and life for God's people. This is a great mystery, and can be hard to understand.

In our second reading, from the book of Hebrews, we read of the cessation of the temple cult, and the Christian understanding that God was fulfilling the prophecy in drawing even closer to God's people, giving them a new covenant, with new hearts and new confidence to dwell in God's presence. The tie of the sacrificial system was ended; something new was at hand. The sacrifice of animals had symbolized and foretold a truth that was finally made plain on Jesus' body. And Jesus' death changed things.

I know in my own life, it is the times of death and loss that strip me of my own confidences, my own self-sufficiency, my own assertiveness. It is in times of weakness, when I can no longer rely on my own strength, that I cast about looking for a firm place on which I can rely. It is in those times: that I remember God, that I cast myself upon God's mercy, that I let go of my own agency and beg God to act instead. Maybe you have experienced these times, too.

Death changes things.

### **IV. Changes**

The Resurrection is not about things being like they always have been. It's the opposite. Death changes things. Resurrection is about a whole new kind of life, a different life.

We have to die to what has been: the good, the bad, and the ugly, before we will be ready to encounter something new from God. The disciples had already seen Jesus transfigured, but that wasn't the full message. The disciples had already seen Lazarus raised from the dead, but that wasn't the full promise.

Jesus led his disciples then as Jesus leads his disciples today: into nothing short of a newness of life that is completely discontinuous with what we have known before. It's more than just odd, more than just unusual or unexpected. In order to get there, we will experience radical change, radical upset, radical loss. That's why we spend a life-time learning the way of faith, learning how to trust in the character of God, developing a tolerance for discomfort that will help us to navigate the great divide between what we know now and the infinitely greater reality God is offering us.

Easter is coming, there's no doubt. But standing between us and Resurrection there is a cross. For today, that's where we are. We are dwelling with the cross. And, Jesus is here, present, to encounter that cross with us. He's done this before: he can tell you the end is totally worth it.

**Amen.**