**Good Friday**

**First Reading Text: Luke 22:39-53**

Luke has a thing for swords. Or maybe I should put it this way. Luke captures a metaphor I think Jesus attempted to use. But we just never get it. Just a couple of verses before this reading, when they are still in the upper room, Jesus tells the disciples “let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one.” The context is how Jesus had sent out the 12 and the 70 earlier. He had sent them out with nothing – no money bag, no knapsack, no sandals. But now, as he sends them back out, things will be rougher.

So when they transition to the garden, Jesus tells them to pray. “Pray that you will not give in to temptation.” He demonstrates such prayer, although a stone’s throw away. And then he returns to find the disciples sleeping. And he again emphasizes, “Get up and pray, so that you will not give in to temptation.” But by then Judas has brought the Temple guard with him to betray Jesus. And while they couldn’t stay awake to pray, now the disciples are hyped. “Lord, should we fight? We brought swords!” See! We were listening!

Luke’s thing for swords, I think is to warn us away. You can’t solve or tackle spiritual things with swords. That doesn’t stop some disciple from trying. They cut off an ear. But Jesus puts a stop to that. “No more of this. Am I some dangerous revolutionary?” No. His kingdom is not of this world. It is not of swords and clubs. The sword they were to get was prayer. The only spiritual weapon we have is prayer. And the prayer is “lead us not into temptation.”

Because naturally we are bound to sin. It is only that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world and our own flesh may not deceive us. We will not win the victory with a sword. But prayer. God loves to answer prayer.

**Second Reading Text: Luke 23:54-71**

Peter was told by Jesus that Satan had asked to sift him like wheat. And he had been told that he would deny Jesus three times. John tells us that it was Peter who had the sword and struck off the ear. It is interesting to ponder what if Peter had followed Jesus’ example and instruction to “pray that you will not give in to temptation” instead of getting a sword. If he had prayed, “may this cup pass from me.” Might it have done so? I’d have to believe yes. Jesus doesn’t seem to be a man to waste words. He tells us the truth, about himself and about us.

In the reality that we have temptation came and Peter falls right into it as Jesus says. But it sets up a comparison of confession. And here I don’t mean confession of sins, but confession of “this is true” or “this I believe.” Peter is asked three times to give a public confession. “You are one of Jesus’ followers.” And this is something that Jesus had talked about in his ministry. “Those who confess me before men, I will confess before my father in heaven.” Now for Peter such a confession here would probably have led to him being placed right beside Jesus. Which is the temptation. Do you seek to preserve you own life, or do you give it up for the sake of Jesus? And Peter three times denies the man.

But Jesus is asked bluntly. “Tell us, are you the messiah?” And Jesus tells them two things about themselves. First, they won’t believe. Jesus will tell the truth, but they won’t believe. And second, if he asked them a question, they would not answer. Which may sound strange, but it was standard Rabbinical back and forth. If you were asking a big question with big consequences like “Are you the messiah?” You get to ask a question back first. A form of mutually assured destruction. But Jesus goes ahead and answers. He knows the outcome and unlike Peter confesses the truth. And he told the truth in all things. They did not believe him. And they would not answer a question.

Confession is always a confession of the truth. And to be on the side of truth is often to be on the wrong side of power. Which is always a question of the Kingdom of Heaven. Which do you like more? Temporal power or eternal truth?

**Third Reading Text: Luke 23:1-12**

The Jews were at least asking the correct question. ‘Are you the messiah?” Of course their knowledge just makes their actions more worthy of judgement.

But before anyone jumps to the ancient blood libel, it is interesting to me how all those who are asked to sit in judgement of Jesus are allowed to judge Jesus by the best knowledge they have. The Jews are asked to judge him by the Word of God and the promise of the messiah.

Pilate is asked to judge him by the standards of Roman law. “Are you the king of the Jews?” which was really the question are you a insurrectionist against Roman order and Roman taxes? And Roman law was the best that we humans had. It’s an ongoing joke to juxtapose the rants of campus radicals about how terrible the United States is, and yet so many of them are here on visas, and will fight tooth and nail being sent home. Lots of places hated Rome and Roman rule, and yet were glad of its existence. And Pilate quickly determines Jesus is innocent. But by his own standards fails.

And Herod. Herod is the case of the complete idiot. He didn’t have the revelation of the Jews, nor did he have the natural law of the Romans. But he had seen and heard reports of this Jesus. He wanted a sign, a miracle. But even by Herod standards – Matthew tells us that Herod considered him John the Baptist come back – by those standards he could have, he should have, corrected his error of killing the Baptist. But Herod sends him back to Pilate.

Jesus comes to us in the best way we could accept him. I think we will all be surprised when all the “footprints” are revealed. At how silly the question “did we have a chance?” is. The trial, the testing, is always that we might pass. Even though many fail.

**Fourth Reading Text: Luke 23:13-25**

Irony is one of those words that has a common definition and a strict definition. The common definition is more like Alanis Morissette’ s song, “Isn’t it ironic?” Which was the juxtaposition of a hoped for outcome with something that falls short of that. “When it rains on your wedding day.” Or “You win the lottery and die the next day.” Not so much irony as Murphy’s law.

Strict Irony is when we look at something one way and God looks at it exactly the opposite. And here – really throughout the passion – we have a strict irony. Here we have a man call Barabbas – Barabbas literally mean the Son of the Father. And this Son of the Father is an insurrectionist. This Son of the Father has murdered and thrown the city into turmoil. Yet the crowds demand the release of this Son of the Father. While Jesus is charged with all the same sins is innocent of them. Jesus is the actual Son of the Father. And it is Jesus that the crowd demands to be crucified.

Our way of seeing things is so often at complete odds with God. That’s the effect of sin. It is John who has the crowd answer Pilot in the extreme divine irony. “His blood be upon us and upon our children.” And they think they are making the correct judgement. That they could carry the blood of Jesus. But it is the divine irony that only if his blood is on you can you make it out. It is the divine irony that all of our sin, all of our missing the mark, all of our terrible judgement – all the blood we cause – is placed upon Jesus. And Jesus takes all of that to the cross.

We so often don’t know what we are doing. But God is always working out everything for the best of his people. While we crucify him. He turns this into our life. The greatest of ironies.

**Fifth Reading Text: Luke 23:26-43**

It’s something of a sociologist parlor game, to make a distinction between guilt cultures and shame cultures. Guilt of course is a legal concept. “I’ve broken the law.” Shame is something different. It is being publicly embarrassed. Losing face. Losing standing. One can be a shameless crook. One can be a shamed upstanding man. Missionaries often play this game with higher stakes. What are the people they are sent to more concerned about overcoming – guilt or shame?

Because the cross of Jesus has something to address to both. Here is the man beaten, stripped naked and hung on a cross for all the world to see. Others are forced to help. Everyone from men of high status to criminals make fun of him. Jesus suffers the shame of the world. Whatever shame you are experiencing, the Son of God was worse. There is no shame in Christ. Weep not for me.

Likewise if we are carrying some great guilt, some dark debt. This cross is the great exchange. The innocent has carried the guilt of the world. Put it there at the foot of the cross.

But where guilt and shame meet is in the thief’s plea. Which to me is the same as Luther’s last words, “we are all beggars.” As things narrow, as we get down to days instead of weeks, or weeks instead of months, you know there are things you cannot repay. Our culture is turning to various forms of suicide in the attempt to avoid the shame of helplessness. But at some point we are all beggars. We are all like the thief, left with only one request. “Remember me.”

And the thief happens to be next to the right person, the King. “Remember me, when you come into you kingdom.” And it is only this Jesus – this Grace – who has the grace to grant the request. Today, you will be with me in paradise. Today, your guilt is paid. Today your shame is removed. Today you are at table with the King.

**Sixth Reading Text: Luke 23:44-49**

It’s a relatively new hymn that we just sang, but I think it meditates on a unique moment that doesn’t get talked about much. It is quickly passed over in the creeds: crucified, died and was buried.

But it is there in all four gospels. “Jesus’ friends, including the women who had followed from Galilee, stood at a distance watching.” And there he hangs for some time. It’s 3 PM. Sundown is around say 7 PM. Joseph is going to have to go request the body from Pilate. And then come back. We are told by the time they finished it’s the Sabbath – so it’s after dark. But there is an hour or two that maybe had to be anti-climactic. You’ve all had days like that and know the feeling. You’ve been running at a high pitch of emotion for hours. And then it just stops. Things around you go on like nothing has happened. But there you are in a fog. Eventually someone comes and closes your mouth and moves you on. Maybe gets you a drink and a seat.

A crucifix, a cross with the corpus on it, isn’t standard in protestant churches. But stare with the women for moment. Unlike the crowds that have gone home in great sorrow. All that has already been wrenched out. There is no sorrow left. All that is left, is the body, hanging there. The silent pain meeting eternity. The man full of life, derelict and still. Everything complete. Fulfilled.

This is really the acid test of faith. What do we see in that body? Is this the death of sin? The death of God? Just a dead deluded man? A tragic innocent? We all stand a distance for a while. Here is the hinge of history. What you say about this pretty much determines everything else. What was finished on this cross?

**Seventh Reading Text: Luke 23:50-56**

There are always days of preparation.

Days when the body has been taken down. Days when what comes next isn’t really known. Days when the hours seem to crawl, although there is plenty to do. Bread to knead and bake. Meals to prepare. Guests to take care of. People to inform. Bodies require upkeep. Even after such events.

Let me suggest so do spiritual bodies. The altar has been stripped. The body taken down. There are meals to prepare. Guests to take care of. Maybe people to inform.

There are always days of preparation.

There are always Holy Saturdays.

Days necessary to reflect. Days necessary to rest. Days to pay attention to the spiritual body.

Days to wait for the Kingdom of God to come.