

St. Columba's Episcopal Church
Good Friday – April 15, 2022
John 18:1 – 19:42
The Rev. Dr. Susan Kraus

We are here today for the love of Jesus. We are here to stand for a time at the foot of the cross with everyone who loves our Lord, with Mary his mother and Mary Magdalene, with the disciple whom Jesus loved, with every soul beloved by God who knows the crucified Christ as Lord and Savior.

Love draws us to the foot of the cross to face what we would rather not face. Helplessness. The love and devotion of Jesus' closest followers could not protect him from pain and death. They were helpless as they watched him suffer. Helpless love is agonizing.

Love draws us to the foot of the cross to face what we would rather not face. Injustice. We see a man who spent his life for the good of others – teaching, feeding, healing, shepherding souls for the love of his heavenly Father. In compassion he reached out to outcasts and sinners and drew them into the circle of God's love. He stretched out his hand to raise up the helpless, the paralyzed, the afflicted. And here he was, helpless himself, raised up on a cross, with no one to save him. The people even taunted him: "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" (Luke 23:35). Here at the foot of the cross we must face the fact that virtue is not necessarily rewarded, that God's love for us and our love for God do not necessarily protect us from harm, that love given to others is no guarantee that love will be returned. Such staggering injustice is agonizing.

Love draws us to the foot of the cross to face what we would rather not face. Evil. Here we see evil in all its darkness and its power to destroy and disrupt, in its absolute contradiction of life and love. Here we see what evil can do – crucify a good and loving man of God. The sight is agonizing.

Love draws us to the foot of the cross to face what we would rather not face. Betrayal. Jesus was betrayed by one of his closest followers. We don't know why Judas betrayed Jesus. Scripture only tells us that he did, and at the foot of the cross we see the result of this betrayal. On Palm Sunday we recalled how Jesus was praised by the crowds as he entered Jerusalem. Yet in a little while the crowds cried, "Crucify him!" How many of the people who shouted "Hosanna!" went on to shout "Crucify him!"? It is a frightening thought. At the foot of the cross we must face our own capacity to betray our Lord. In the words of the gospel hymn, we are challenged to ask, "Lord, is it I who betrayed thee today?" An agonizing thought.

Love draws us to the foot of the cross to face what we would rather not face. But love also draws us here to stand – to kneel – in awe of the love and goodness of God revealed in our crucified Lord. I once saw a photograph of a simple wooden crucifix. It was like many other crucifixes, except for this. The arms of Jesus were not stretched out and nailed to the beam of wood. His arms were stretched forward, reaching out to anyone who would draw near and be gathered into the loving embrace of God.

I pray that, as we stand for a time at the foot of the cross today, each of us will be drawn more deeply into the loving embrace of God. May God's love for us inspire us to love and serve the Lord with all our hearts, with all our souls, with all our minds, and with all our strength. In the name of Christ. Amen.