

St. Columba's Episcopal Church  
Good Friday – March 29, 2024  
John 18:1–19:42; The Book of Common Prayer, pages 276-282  
The Rev. Dr. Susan Kraus

Today our scripture readings and our prayers speak fully and eloquently to the events and the meaning of Good Friday. It is a daunting task to find words to add to today's very profound service.

I have led worship on Good Friday for many years, and I have participated in worship on Good Friday for many more years, in many kinds of churches. I imagine that all of you have also attended many Good Friday services. We know the story well. We are not surprised by the events of Jesus' last days, as we hear them once again on Palm Sunday, and on Maundy Thursday, and on Good Friday. But, familiar as the story is, by the working of the Holy Spirit there is always something new to learn, if we listen with our hearts as well as our minds. Please take your service leaflets with you when you leave the church today. Slowly and prayerfully, moved by the Holy Spirit, review the words we speak this noon. Let your soul be touched and moved.

This year, as I read and re-read what is called the Passion Narrative – the account of Jesus' suffering in the last days of his life – I was deeply impressed by Jesus' courage. When he entered Jerusalem to the acclaim of the people shouting "Hosanna!", Jesus knew that he was facing grave danger. I imagine that the people were looking happy and excited, but that Jesus was looking solemn, perhaps even stern. Events were building to a climax, and Jesus chose not to retreat or escape, but to ride on into the danger. That took profound courage.

I have also felt deep sadness for Jesus as a man who was innocent of any evil, yet who suffered at the hands of others who were not so good. Jesus was certainly not the only innocent person who has suffered in this way. Countless innocent people have suffered and are suffering now, as we know. But as the incarnate Lord who healed and taught and fed and guided God's people, who did nothing but good in his life, he uniquely shows forth the horror of innocent suffering. There are many reactions we might have to that. This year mine was deep sadness.

Finally, compassion. By contemplating the suffering of Jesus and being moved by his suffering, we may grow in compassion. In his ministry Jesus was moved by compassion for the afflictions of the people who sought him out. In compassion he healed people and forgave people. Jesus recognized that God's people were like sheep without a shepherd, and in compassion, he led them in God's ways of love and righteousness. Compassion is more than feeling sadness for others' distress. Compassion moves us to act to alleviate others' distress.

As lovers of God and followers of Jesus, we are meant to live as Jesus taught us to live, by his example and his words. As we gaze upon the cross of Christ and feel compassion for his suffering, let's ask ourselves how we might be called to be more compassionate in our lives. It might be helpful to think about the invisible crosses that people bear – like grief or loneliness or anxiety about the future – as well as the obvious crosses, like illness. It might be helpful to ask ourselves how we might help others carry their crosses. That includes not only the people we see and know, but people around the world who are suffering and in need of our help.

Finally, let us acknowledge that each of us carries our own cross, a unique cross formed by what we have suffered and what we suffer now. Yes, we carry our cross, but not alone. On Good Friday we remember that Jesus – our crucified Lord – is with us. Not only in our times of joy and peace but in our times of sorrow and pain as well. Always. In compassion for our suffering, Jesus offers us his presence and his power to heal and to forgive. Remember that and let us also remember the good people we know who have helped us and are helping us now to bear our crosses. Both people who are living and people who have already gone home to God. We are not alone. We are in the company of our Lord and of countless other lovers of God and followers of Jesus. For this and for all of God's many blessings, let us give God thanks! In Jesus' name. Amen.