

Preached at Grace Church, Alexandria, Virginia
Good Friday, April 18th, 2014

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Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12
Hebrews 10:16-25
John 18:1-19:37

When I was in grade school, some of my closest friends, who were not Christian, came to me and asked me to explain something. “What happened on Good Friday?” they asked. I told them that it was the day Jesus died. “That’s what we thought,” they replied, “so what we don’t understand, is why do you call it *Good* Friday? Of all the days for Christians, that seems like the worst!”

The Cross indeed is a sign of a wisdom that is not human wisdom. To us, it does not seem like the way to any victory. It seems like defeat. As humans, we are generally more inclined to try to accomplish things by force of power than by weakness. But God shows us in the Cross that weakness has a power of its own through the greater power of Love.

Love, incredibly directed to us, who so often turn our wills against God, even though it was He Himself who made us.

In the beginning, God created the world as His garden, and invited us to tend it. We are told that He walked with those first human beings in the long years of the blossoming of the earth. We are told that we were fashioned by God’s loving hands, and formed into the very image of God. We are told that we were His friends. We walked with Him about the earth, His garden, each day, “at the time of the evening breezes”. God delighted in us. We delighted in Him.

God has been fashioning humans in His image since He formed the very first of us. He has been fashioning us in love, in friendship.

We are His creatures. Do you often think, or realize that God has formed you? He has directed the growth of your body, all your life. He is doing so right now. Before you knew yourself, He fashioned your very soul. You were not, and yet now, here you are. Your life, your being, is utter gift.

But despite this, we somehow become estranged from God, turn away from Him. Something has happened. Can you feel it? Something is not the way it was meant to be. God’s children are alienated from Him. Many live lives of anger, or despair. Even those of us who have been incorporated into His body often feel distant from Him. We put all sorts of things in priority over Him. We reject many of the good things He wills for us.

We neglect our friends, our families, our neighbors. We put our own interests before the work of loving them as they should be loved. We actually do things to deliberately harm each other, whether striking out in anger, or saying just the words we know will most hurt the ones we are supposed to be loving.

There was a first time. There was a first time that we, the recipients of countless good gifts from God, not the least our very lives, chose to turn away from Him. There was a time when we chose to do something we knew we shouldn’t have done, and we stepped away from our good creator. And that was a betrayal.

We know about betrayal in our human relationships. We can take an action that breaks the trust of someone we love. We have seen wounded relationships, where there is a rift that cannot just be ignored, cannot just be covered up and hidden. When we repent of betrayal we ask for forgiveness, and those who love us can forgive us.

But we know that it takes more to heal that relationship. Trust has been broken, and it is not such an easy thing to fix. We must rebuild that trust, by living into the relationship as it should have been all along. By being a true friend, by showing true love, we can “make things right” again.

How, then, to make right our wounded relationship with God?

This is what Jesus has done for us today. This is what He did in the whole sacrifice of His life. Jesus Christ is our Lord and our God, but He is also a human. And in His life, He lived the life we were supposed to live. He lived a life of perfect love for God our Father.

He lived a life of perfect love for His fellow humans, as God had designed us to do. He lived a life of perfect obedience to God our Creator, an obedience we all owe to God, for He has made us, and we are His.

It had seemed that humans could do nothing to repair their relationship with God. We couldn't live a life without sinning against Him. So how could we make things right with God after breaking our relationship to Him?

Only Christ has been able to do this. He lived the life God meant Him to live. And He did not have to die, at the young age of 33, but He was willing to surrender His life, when humans demanded it because He told them things about God that they would not accept. He surrendered it, and did not grasp after even His own life if it meant denying the truth He knew about God. He surrendered it, and gave us an example of how to live with perfect trust in God, and perfect dedication to His will. He surrendered it, and showed a human who lived and died in perfect love for God.

And this, my brothers and sisters, has healed the wound. In Jesus Christ, humanity lived up to all we were meant to be. In Jesus Christ, God and humanity have had trust restored, and our relationship reconciled. And so, in baptism, we join ourselves to the body of Jesus Christ and we become humans in right relationship with God.

We are restored. And even on this day when we remember how the Son of God was willing to suffer and die, we cannot help but also remember that God has restored Him to life.

And so He restores us. As we have been baptized into Christ's death, so we too shall have a resurrection like His. Our lives will not be demanded of us, and the grave will not be able to hold us, for in Christ, God has forgiven us all, the wound has been healed, and we have the opportunity to live in perfect love and relationship with Him. The healing which Christ has brought about will never be undone.

So today, on “*Good Friday*”, even in the midst of the darkness and sorrow of the Cross, let us not grieve too much, but let us have hearts filled with gratitude for the loving act which Christ has done on our behalf, and for the loving embrace that our God extends to us, even from the hard wood of the Cross.