

Sermon for Palm Sunday 2018: Standing at the Cross of Christ

Introduction: Standing Together at the Foot of the Cross

We've answered Jesus call to follow Him to an unexpected place today;

We've followed to a place where we really didn't expect to find Jesus

But we've followed Jesus to the place that He has chosen;

For make no mistake, Jesus chose to take up the cross of Calvary

So that He may restore us, cleanse us, forgive us

And show us the way that leads to real life.

We've gathered together today at the foot of the cross of Jesus,

Struggling to understand how it has come to this:

How the teachings, the healings, the miracles, the love that knows no limits

Could be nailed to the hard wood of a cross,

Fighting for a next breath; yielding His last breath.

We've gathered together today at the foot of the cross of Jesus

Ashamed and dismayed by the truth that we have a part in putting Jesus there.

It's not merely the work of Judas Iscariot or the Jewish leaders

It's not only the work of Pontius Pilate or the power of Rome;

For by our sins, by the sins of the world through all time,

By our rejection of God and our focus on ourselves;

We might just as well have turned Jesus over to the authorities;

Yelled for Pilate to *Crucify Him*; and driven in the nails with our own hands.

We're gathered together today at the foot of the cross of Jesus in our own suffering

Astonished that God suffers, too;

Astonished that God would reveal that in His suffering, He is with us;

For on the cross God reveals that He suffers the rejection, the pain, the loss,

The indignity, the grief, the dying that we know,

Only multiplied by the suffering of people through all time.

We gather together today at the foot of the cross of Jesus
Marveling at the mystery of God's great love for us;
Trying to understand in some, small way, a love so deep, so broad, so high,
That nothing and no one can separate us from the love of God
Revealed in Jesus' willing death on a cross.

We gather together today at the foot of the cross of Jesus
As a reminder and in remembrance that the cross of Jesus is at the center of our faith.

All we do, all we seek, all we pray for is hanging here;
Hanging here to reveal how we've fallen short of God's desire for our lives
And at the same time disclosing God's unfathomable, forgiving love for us;
Bringing to light a love unknown, hanging between heaven and earth
And offering us the way back to God.

The Cross at the Center

It's a difficult place to gather, the foot of the cross;
And many people, including Christians, struggle with the cross of Jesus;
For as St. Paul says the cross is a stumbling block to some
And foolishness to others to think that God would die for us
To take away our sins and to reveal God's kingdom of love and truth.

It's hard to gather here because we don't live in the same religious world of Jesus' time
Or the religious world through most of the world's history;
We don't live in a time when sacrifice for sin was a normal part of a life with God;
Where blood sacrifice meant new life
Where the blood, the sacrifice of some animal,
Could atone, could cover, could take away one's sin.

And so we struggle to connect to the very idea that the blood of Jesus,
The sacrifice of the God-Man Jesus could cover our sins,
Could take them away and bring us to new life in God.

It's hard to gather at the cross because as in Jesus' day,
We live in world in which might makes right and for the Son of God
To set aside His power turns our worldview on end
And we turn away from the cross as a sign of God's weakness.

Yet we know somehow in the depths of our hearts that the coercive force of power
Produces an environment of fear and mistrust and separation
Rather than a spirit of love and hope and mutuality.

Jesus stands silent before Pontius Pilate and the power of this world to reveal
That His kingdom is not of this world; His kingdom is not like this world;
His kingdom is not of the world of coercion and command
But a kingdom of love and truth, a reign of grace and empowerment.

We have trouble standing at the foot of the cross
Because we live in a world in which the explainable is the only truth;
We measure and examine, we theorize and prove;
In our world seeing is believing and what cannot be seen and understood
Is quickly discounted and dismissed.

And so the belief that God not only came down from heaven to live as one of us
But also was willing to suffer the humiliation of crucifixion
Presents us with a mystery that we can never fully grasp
Much less define or prove;
And so we turn away, seeking more explainable conclusions.

We may be comfortable with Jesus' teachings about how to live our lives
And the goodness of loving God and loving our neighbor;
We may appreciate the miracles Jesus performed
And His willingness to seek after the lost and the excluded.

But the cross casts a different light on what it means to be Jesus' follower
As it strikes at the heart of human pride and human indifference toward God
Bringing us face to face with our sin, our separation,
And our need for God's forgiveness.

Many years ago, we had a meeting at St. David's with a well known consultant and priest
Who was involved in helping churches build and renovate their sanctuaries;
We had asked this man to meet with us as we considered
How we might decorate the old Chapel to better serve our worship needs
(Little did we know what a change God and we were beginning.)

Someone in the group made mention that we wanted to hang a large cross in the space
To serve as a reminder that the cross is at the center of our faith
The symbol of God's great love for us.

A member of our committee asked where he thought we should place such a cross.
And he responded with the statement that he didn't think we should consider
Putting a cross in the space because it's not a Christian symbol;
But more accurately a symbol of Roman power and cruelty
That really has no place in a Christian church.

We smiled and were polite, but we all had the different view about the cross;
How the cross became and still is the symbol of God's grace and love
Because on a cross Jesus saved the world from sin and death;
On a cross Jesus revealed that God suffers with us;
On a cross Jesus revealed God's great and mysterious love for us;
On a cross Jesus offered us a way back into the life with God;
And assured us that His call to follow
Is a call from a God we can trust and love.

And so we preach Christ and Him crucified

And gather today at the foot of the cross to draw close to the mystery of God's love

Revealed in our suffering, dying Lord

Gathered in the hope of salvation and in the promise of new life.

Standing at the Cross

So let us stand a little while longer beneath the cross of Jesus;

Let us stand at this very unexpected place Jesus has called us to come and follow Him;

Let us stand awhile today and through this Holy Week

That He may restore us, cleanse us, forgive us;

As he reveals the love of God for us and for all people.

That we may know God's forgiveness, God's hope, God's love;

As He shows us the way that leads to real life now

And the new life to come.

Amen.