

Good Friday
Mark 15:1-47
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Good Friday Time

Time's a funny thing. We know the facts: 60 seconds in minute, 60 minutes in an hour, 24 hours in a day, 365 days in a year. There's a steadiness to time, one second after another: a metronome, with its constant beat. And yet in our human perceptions, time's not steady. It ebbs and flows, sometimes racing, other times dragging along painfully.

For me, time races when it's been awhile since I've seen my young grandchildren. Three months go by and they've changed so much! Rosie's gone from just beginning to sit up to the constant motion of crawling and pulling herself up to walk around the furniture. In just another heartbeat, she'll be asking for the car keys. Time flying by.

And time's passing can also be a heavy burden: a river relentless flowing on, never stopping. Time never to be regained. Holy Week is one of those times for me, as I painfully slow march with Jesus to the cross. I imagine that Jesus, too, must have palpably felt time slipping through his fingers in these final days. From the triumphant shouts as he and the disciples entered into Jerusalem to those last moments of sharing a final meal and washing the disciples feet, I imagine Jesus was fully aware that his time was so limited and he suffered with the burden of trying to insure the disciples both heard and understood him — take up your cross and follow me; humbly serve others; love God by loving your neighbor. So much to reinforce in those final days and hours, in the hope that the disciples could hold onto his words and recall his actions when Jesus was gone.

For Jesus knew his time had come.

We heard today in Mark's gospel the retelling of his last hours: the mind-numbing, horrific, brutal hours of betrayal, abandonment, torture, and death, the laying of his body in the tomb.

But what strikes me most is *knowing* the actions of those who were closest to Jesus . . . the haunting, painful denial by Peter and the abandonment by the disciples, as they hid in fear. Abandonment by those who were closest to him, who knew him best, who recognized who Jesus was. Those who loved him. We're always the most vulnerable to being hurt by those we love. The disciples should have stood by him. They should have been there. Yet their fear, their need for self-preservation, overcame them. And Jesus was alone.

As I child, I would hear these words and envision myself standing there, right in the middle of it all. And I just knew I would be different. I could be strong! I wouldn't run away! I would stand with Jesus.

But today, my eyes see much more clearly. I see the unfortunate truth of who I am and I'm actually part of the yelling crowd, part of the world, shouting "Crucify him, crucify him," just as we did together in the Passion reading this past Palm Sunday. While Jesus holds nothing back, laying down his life of his own accord, sacrificing himself in love for all of the world,

here I am, like Peter and all the others, denying Jesus, holding myself back, and hiding in fear.

Because it's hard to live like Jesus. It's hard to carry our cross and live fully into our baptismal covenant. Because if we stood up with our Lord against the world, then we would be there, too — tortured and bleeding, ridiculed and isolated — for the world doesn't reward those who act for justice, or serve with loving kindness, or walk humbly with God. That's not the world's way.

And so we tend to do what's safe and what's nice and what's comfortable. Because if we're really honest with ourselves, none of us really want to lose our selves or our lives, even for Christ's sake. We may take the time to strive for an occasional self-improvement project, but these can only carry us so far, imprisoned as we are within our human shell of sin. For in spite of our best intentions, we, in our humanness, routinely do what we do not want to do, and not do what we want to do, because of the sin within us.

If we look truthfully at our own lives, it's not just the people of Jesus' time — the disciples, or the crowds, or the religious and political leadership — who abandon Jesus. We too abandon Jesus. We too leave him alone to suffer and die. We too were there, in our frailty, our weakness, our humanness — centered on ourselves, rather than openly, vulnerably, and compassionately loving God and our neighbor.

And as he looks down from the cross, what does Jesus see?

He sees us, who brutally nailed him to the tree.
He sees us, who had the ability to intervene, but did nothing.
He sees us, who feared so much more for our own lives, that we ran and hid.
He sees us, who who were too busy to get involved, or too apathetic to care.
He sees us, who helplessly stood by, watched, and wept.
He sees all of us. For in our humanness, we were all there.

And then he died.

This could have been the end of the story. A short and tragic story of a man and his companions who tried to usher in change and embody God's love in our harsh and chaotic world. This could have been a short story of how good intentions were crushed in the face of corruption, evil, and scheming to maintain power and authority and continue the status quo.

Yet we know this is not the end. There is more to this story. And we will come together at the Easter Vigil to once again hear the next chapter, for Jesus' crucifixion brings us the reality of God's generous and otherworldly gift of eternal life and love.

But today is the time for us to remain here, to remain present in this dark time, recognizing the reality of our own sinfulness and frailty — that we are but dust and to dust we shall return — and consider how we will called to live, to follow our Lord and Savior's path of life and love, in our own remaining time, and although we fail, again and again, we are forgiven.

We will soon have the opportunity to draw together to venerate the cross, recognizing the great sacrifice of our Lord and his love for us. I encourage you to be fully present in this

moment, recalling all that Christ has done for you, remembering Jesus' ultimate act of overflowing love and grace to redeem the world, and be thankful. Amen.