

Good Friday

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Date: Friday, April 10, 2020, 10:02 AM EDT

The Rev. Ronald G. Abrams

Good Friday 2020

The Gift of Courage

I once had a seminary professor who asked us to sum up certain events in Jesus' life with one word. Some events were easier than others. Christmas would be "incarnation." Obviously on Maundy Thursday the word would be "love." On Easter it is "resurrection" or "life." But how about this day, Good Friday! If you could choose one word to sum up Jesus' agonizing death on the cross, the pain and confusion of His followers and the totality of this holy story that has been passed down to us, what would it be? I am sure many answers would be appropriate, but for me the word that sums up this day is "COURAGE."

Courage made it possible for Jesus to embody all the other gifts he possessed: love, mercy, forgiveness, faithfulness, obedience and humility. Throughout His life, but especially on the cross, we find Jesus' manifestation of courage at its pinnacle in order for God's plan of salvation to be realized.

Courage, though, does not exist in a vacuum. It swells deep in the human heart and mind as a result of pain, confusion, hope, sacrifice, faith and suffering. Jesus understood this. That is why in John's Gospel, Jesus gives His followers, as well as you and me, the perspective we need to embrace the challenges of this world when he said, *"In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good courage, I have overcome the world."* (John 16:33)

During this time of year, there are several movies about Jesus on television – from *"The Greatest Story Ever Told"* to *"The Passion of the Christ."* Each movie tells the story of Jesus' life from a different perspective, but all the movies go to great lengths to show the suffering and the courage of Jesus. Not only was Jesus' courage manifested on this day, but several of His followers as well. They displayed different types of courage as they experienced that horrific Friday in Jerusalem. On this Good Friday, two central figures in the crucifixion story stand out.

He has been described as "big, bold, impulsive, dynamic, a leader, confident and committed." Yes, next to Judas, no other disciple hurt Jesus more than Peter. As Jesus was making his way to the cross, what he needed more than anything else was the love and support from his friends. But there is Peter, denying our Lord three times, running away from the suffering like a dog with his tail between his legs. This momentary lapse of courage reduced Peter to weeping and shame. At times we can be like Peter as well! If Peter's story – or for that matter our stories – ended with this lack of courage, life would be radically different.

Peter's faith motivated him to muster a new type of courage. He developed the courage to embrace and recognize his sin, seek forgiveness and was restored into full relationship with his

Lord and his fellow disciples. This new courage was at work on that first Easter morning when Peter ran furiously to the empty tomb and proclaimed to the others the good news of the resurrection. Today we remember the life and legacy of St. Peter in many ways. This would not be possible unless Peter had the courage to seek forgiveness and healing. May the same be true of us on this Good Friday!

Another witness to Jesus' crucifixion was none other than his mother Mary. As a parent the hardest thing to do is to see your children suffer. The flu, a bad grade, a broken heart over a first love or the loss on a ball field eats at a parent's heart. And yet, none of these events even comes close to Mary's agony as she watched her innocent son tortured and killed.

Mary, though, had the courage to move forward in faith. When I think of Mary's courage during the horrible events of that first Good Friday, I recall the words in our baptismal liturgy: "*The courage to persevere.*" Mary's courage was the glue that kept the faithful together despite their temporary, awful loss. Mary's courage is a clear reminder to us of our need – especially at this present moment when life feels so off-balanced – to be courageous when pain, pandemic and even death invade the lives of those we love as well as our own life.

Finally, Good Friday would not be Good Friday without Jesus' physical, emotional and spiritual courage. During his earthly life, Jesus had the courage to heal on the Sabbath, eat with sinners and challenge the Pharisees. Each and every deed done and spoken was filled with courage. And now, as he was dying on the hard wood of the cross, Jesus completes His most courageous act of all: "*It is finished.*" This is not some gasp from a worn-out life, but a cry of conquest over sin and death. Jesus had the courage to fulfill the work of redemption for you and me. By His courage we can live abundantly in this life, despite the challenges it brings.

Peter, Mary and Jesus all displayed tremendous acts of courage on that dark Friday some 2000 years ago. By their witness we can have the courage to move forward to Easter morning and be reassured by Jesus' words: "*In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good courage, I have overcome the world.*"

Let us Pray:

Almighty God, whose beloved Son willingly endured the agony and shame of the cross for our redemption: Give us courage to take up our cross and follow him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(Book of Common Prayer, page 252)

The Good Friday liturgy can be found in The Book of Common Prayer, page 276.

From the

Diocese: https://s3.amazonaws.com/dfc_attachments/public/documents/3275628/Holy_Week-The_Three_Days_for_Home_1_2_.pdf