

“Everything Must Change”

Date: April 2, 2021

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts Psalm 22; Luke 22:39 – 23:56

Occasion: Good Friday

Themes: Crucifixion, God’s nature, Good Friday

Today’s message was first presented in Brian McClaren’s book *We Make the Road by Walking*. Let’s begin by imagining ourselves with the disciples just before 3:00 on this Friday afternoon. A few of us have gathered to talk about what has happened over the last 24 hours.

“It all started falling apart late last night when Judas, along with a band of soldiers, came for Jesus. All we could think about was saving ourselves. Only Peter and John had the courage to stay with Jesus for a while. By the time the sun started to rise, Peter was having an emotional breakdown and John had run away, too.

The next thing we knew, about nine this morning, Jesus was carrying his own cross through the streets of Jerusalem. It was obvious he had been beaten, scourged mercilessly, mocked and tortured. He was hardly recognizable. By noon he was hanging on the cross.

During the last three hours, some of us have gathered at a distance to watch. We’ve been silent, lost in our own thoughts, but no doubt all our thoughts have been replaying the same tape of our shared memories with Jesus.

We’ve been remembering last evening in the garden, before Judas showed up. We kept falling asleep as Jesus prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, take this cup of suffering away from me. However, not what I want but what you want. With tears and in great distress, he prayed a second and third time.

But the thrust of his prayer had shifted, from what might be possible

to what might *not* be possible: “My Father, if it is not possible that this cup be taken away unless I drink it, then let it be what you want.” In the second and third prayers, he was clearly preparing to die.

But why? Why was there no other way? Why did this good man – the best we have ever known, the best we have ever imagined – why did he have to face torture and execution as if he were some terrible monster?

As the hours drag on from noon to nearly three o’clock, we imagine many reasons. Some are political. The Pharisees were right to be concerned last Sunday when Jesus came marching into the capital. First our little parade – the Romans would have called it a rebellious mob – proclaimed Jesus as king.

From there, he marched into the Temple and called it a hide-out for crooks, turning over the tables and upsetting the religious economy. Only a fool would do things like these without expecting consequences. Jesus was no fool.

We think about more spiritual reasons for this to have happened. Jesus has told us again and again that God is different from our assumptions. We’ve assumed that God was righteous and pure in a way that makes God hate the unrighteous and impure.

But Jesus has told us that God is pure love, so overflowing in goodness that God pours out compassion on the pure and impure alike. He not only told us of God’s unlimited compassion, he has lived it every day as we have walked this road with him.

He showed this boundless compassion in the way he sat at table with everyone, in the way he has touched untouchables and refused to condemn even the most notorious sinners. He has embodied for us a very different vision of what God is like.

At dinner last night, when he knelt down and washed our feet, and later when he called us his friends, what was that supposed to mean? Was he trying to show us that God isn't a dictator high in the sky eager for us to cower in fear at his feet? Was he inviting us to think of God as the one who is down here with us, who stoops low and touches feet – as a servant would?

Was he telling us that God would rather cleanse us than condemn us? If that was the case last night, what could this horrible day be trying to show us? Could there be any meaning in this catastrophe playing out before us now?

And then we think: if Jesus is showing us something so radical about God, what is he telling us about ourselves – about human beings and our social and religious institutions? What does it mean when our political leaders and our religious leaders come together to mock and torture and kill God's messenger, God's beloved child, God's best and brightest?

How misguided can our nation be? Is this the only way religions and government maintain order – by threatening us with pain, shame and death if we don't comply? And is this how they unify us – by turning us into a mob that comes together in its shared hatred of the latest loser, rebel, outcast, or prophet?

The Romans boast of their peace, and our priests boast of their holiness and justice. But today it all looks like a sham, a fraud, a con game. What kind of a world have we made? What kind of people have we become?

One minute the crowds were flocking to Jesus, hoping for free bread and healing. The next minute they were shouting, "Crucify him!" And we, his so-called disciples, we are no better. One minute we're sharing a meal

with him and he was calling us his friends. Now, here we stand at a distance, unwilling to identify ourselves with him, and possibly risk what he is going through.

It has grown strangely dark now, in the middle of the afternoon, and in the darkness, even from this distance, we can hear Jesus say, “Father, forgiven them!” he shouts. “For they don’t know what they are doing.”

Forgive them? Forgive us?

Our thoughts bring us again to the garden last night, when Jesus asked if there could be any other way. And now it seems clear. There could be no other way to show us what God is truly like. God is not revealed in killing and conquest, in violence and hate. God is revealed in this crucified man – giving of himself to the very last breath, giving and forgiving.

And there could be no other way to show us what we are truly like. We do not know what we are doing, indeed.

If God is like this, and if we are like this... then everything must change. Everything must change.”

This message is taken from *We Make the Road by Walking* by Brian D. McLaren. New York, Boston, Nashville: Jericho Books, 2014, pp. 158 – 160.