

Good Friday

April 18, 2025

First Verse of *I Wonder as I Wander*

Today is a day that causes us to wonder. It is a day that is both painful and glorious. It is a day that witnessed the suffering of the innocent One who died to pay the price for the guilty ones. One is bound; the other set free. One gives up the life that was His to keep; the other gains life that was not his to have.

What took place on the cross deepens the awareness of our own sin while expanding our experience of God's grace. What happened is unfathomable; it cannot be fully measured. It is indescribable; its impact cannot be fully expressed.

This day is a day to wonder for the shadow of the cross touches every moment of human history and every element of our lives.

Today we want to ponder the price that Christ paid and the blessing that payment brings to us. We will do that by looking at the cross through Peter's eyes as he struggled to understand why it had to be, and then we will look at it through our own eyes and the freedom Christ brings to us through it.

I hope you picked up a card and a pen on the way in. When all has been said and done and we hear the Lord cry out "It is finished!", we will have a moment to write on those cards something you need to surrender to the Lord.

Maybe it is a sin for which you need to be forgiven. It could be an idol that you cling to, knowing that you need to let go of it in order to hold on to Jesus. Maybe it is a burden you are tired of carrying alone or a worry that just won't leave you. It could be a terrible wrong done to you that you still need to forgive.

I don't know what it may be but as we journey to the cross together tonight be listening for the Holy Spirit. Ask Him to show you specific ways the Lord's cross impacts your life even today and then have the courage to respond by writing it down and nailing it to the cross.

Nailing your card on the cross marks the final moment of this observance. Once you do that you are free to go and welcome to stay.

The shadow of the cross falls on us, even as it fell on those first disciples. We pick up the story where we left off last night.

After they had eaten together, they sang a hymn and then made the short walk to the Garden of Gethsemane. This was a familiar place of peace for them, though not tonight.

It was now very late, and the disciples were exhausted. Recent events brought a physical and emotional drain. Without the benefit of the Holy Spirit in them and the resurrection behind them, they struggled to understand Jesus' words about what was going to happen. They were confused and so intellectually weary as well.

Peter, though, remained resolute. Just a few months before this moment, Jesus told His disciples that He would be arrested, suffer and die. Peter told Jesus that Jesus was not going to be arrested, He was not going to suffer and He was not going to die. Peter was not going to let that happen to his Lord. He had confidence in his own perspective and in his own ability to get done what he thought needed to be done.

Peter, James and John were successful fishing partners. Fishing is a hard job filled with challenges and uncertainty. Peter was used to pushing through any difficult circumstance to achieve what he wanted.

Yet that's not how it started with Jesus. Peter's first encounter with his Lord highlighted his failure, not his success. It emphasized what happens when he chooses to listen to Jesus instead of relying on his own understanding.

It was early morning and Jesus told Peter to get back on the water and let down his nets for a catch. Peter said, "Lord, we have been fishing all night and have not caught a thing...but because you say so, I'll let down the nets." And the haul of fish was so great that the nets began to break and the boats began to sink.

As a fisherman, Peter was used to working hard, anticipating what would be needed, and carrying the right tools for whatever job was coming. As part of his preparation for what Jesus said was coming, Peter began to carry a sword.

It was probably a little smaller than this, but it was sharp and effective. This sword feels good in the hand, like it belongs there. This is the kind of tool that can get the job done.

For millennia the sword has been a symbol of human power and control. In the right hands it is a tool for justice and making things right by forcing one person's will onto another. In the wrong hands it is a tool for injustice and making things wrong by forcing one person's will onto another.

In any hand it is a tool for getting things done the way you want them done.

This is what the sword meant to them, and it is what it means to us. Our swords can be any tool we use to force our will on someone else. With the right sword, the right plan and the right number of people, we believe we can make what we think is wrong, right again.

This idea of fighting force with force is so deeply entrenched in society that we don't question it. Neither did the disciples. I think it is one of the reasons that they, and we, may have a hard time applying our Lord's teaching.

Think of it. Whenever Jesus brought up his coming death, Peter said they could stop it from happening. From a human point of view, the only way to stop force from happening is by meeting force with a greater force. As the Christ, Jesus would certainly have the greater force and Peter was ready to use it. That's his implied message, and so he must have been startled when Jesus did not agree with him.

The first time Jesus announced his coming passion and death Peter said, "No Lord. You're not going to be arrested or suffer or die. I will not let that happen." Jesus replied, "Get away from me, Satan! You are a dangerous trap to me. You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God's" (Mt 16:23).

On their last night together, Peter said that he would rather die than deny Jesus. He even set himself against the other disciples by saying, "These others may deny you, but I never will. I'm with you, Lord. You can count on me!"

Jesus replied, "I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today you will deny me three times." The air must have gone out of his lungs as he wondered, "So, if they come to take you, what are we supposed to do?" You can almost feel Peter fighting against this new way of looking at the world.

In essence Peter was saying, "I am above this. Stronger than this. Better than this, and you are too, Jesus. Listen to me because I know what is best for this moment."

And Jesus replied, "You are looking at it all wrong. You are seeing things merely from a human point of view. The cross is the only way. Listen to me. Believe what I tell you, because what I tell you is true."

And so after they finished the meal and sang the hymn, they walked to that place where it all came to a head, The Garden of Gethsemane. Matthew describes it this way.

Gethsemane (Mt 26:36-46)

³⁶ Then Jesus went with them to the olive grove called Gethsemane, and he said, "Sit here while I go over there to pray." ³⁷ He took Peter and Zebedee's two sons, James and John, and he became anguished and distressed. ³⁸ He told them, "My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

³⁹ He went on a little farther and bowed with his face to the ground, praying, "My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine."

⁴⁰ Then he returned to the disciples and found them asleep. He said to Peter, "Couldn't you watch with me even one hour? ⁴¹ Keep watch and pray, so that you will not give in to temptation. For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak!"

⁴² Then Jesus left them a second time and prayed, "My Father! If this cup cannot be taken away unless I drink it, your will be done." ⁴³ When he returned to them again, he found them sleeping, for they couldn't keep their eyes open.

⁴⁴ So he went to pray a third time, saying the same things again. ⁴⁵ Then he came to the disciples and said, "Go ahead and sleep. Have your rest. But look—the time has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶ Up, let's be going. Look, my betrayer is here!"

⁴⁷ And even as Jesus said this, Judas, one of the twelve disciples, arrived with a crowd of men armed with swords and clubs. They had been sent by the leading priests and elders of the people. ⁴⁸ The traitor, Judas, had given them a prearranged signal: "You will know which one to arrest when I greet him with a kiss." ⁴⁹ So Judas came straight to Jesus. "Greetings, Rabbi!" he exclaimed and gave him the kiss.

⁵⁰ Jesus said, "My friend, go ahead and do what you have come for."

Then the others grabbed Jesus and arrested him. ⁵¹ But [Peter] pulled out his sword and struck the high priest's slave, slashing off his ear.

⁵² Then Jesus said, "Put away your sword. No more of this." And he touched the man's ear and healed him. "Those who use the sword will die by the sword. ⁵³ Don't you realize that I could ask my Father for thousands of angels to protect us, and he would send them instantly? ⁵⁴ But if I did, how would the Scriptures be fulfilled that describe what must happen now?"

⁵⁵ Then Jesus said to the crowd, "Am I some dangerous revolutionary, that you come with swords and clubs to arrest me? Why didn't you arrest me in the Temple? I was there teaching every day. ⁵⁶ But this is all happening to fulfill the words of the prophets as recorded in the Scriptures." At that point, all the disciples deserted him and fled."

The dreaded moment had arrived, and Peter concluded this was the time to take matters into his own hands. He thought Jesus needed his help so he didn't wait for Jesus to give the command to use their swords (Lk 22:49). He knew what needed to be done so he drew his sword and went for the nearest person's head.

Let's unpack this a little. Malchus, the high priest's servant, would have taken evasive action. He was likely wearing a helmet with some body armor so that the blade struck the side of his helmet, slid down the metal and struck the ear before coming to rest on his shoulder padding.

Peter's actions jeopardized everything Jesus had taught and worked for. Both sides now braced for the encounter as the sound of swords leaving their sheaths filled the garden. That's when a voice of true authority stopped everyone in their tracks.

Imagine what Peter felt when he heard Jesus's words. "Put your sword away....for all who draw the sword will die by the sword (Mt 26:52). What? Why? How?

And then came the words that put the entire moment into a new light. "Don't you realize that I could ask my Father for thousands of angels to protect us, and he would send them instantly? ⁵⁴ But if I did, how would the Scriptures be fulfilled that describe what must happen now?"

Peter, you are seeing things merely from a human point of view with you at the center of it all. Stop. Listen to me and learn to see your life and circumstances with God at the center of it all.

As it was with Peter, so too it is with us. Jesus does not need our help; He wants our allegiance. He wants our fidelity to His teaching and His way.

When we read the story, it is clear that Peter only listened to part of what Jesus said. He stopped short of gaining the full picture of how God was going to work through the terrible suffering that was to come. So he denied Jesus and used force against force.

It makes me wonder, what part of Christ's teaching have we missed? Where are we trying to force the outcome to meet our desire? On this painful, glorious day, what do we need to surrender to the Lord?

- Maybe it is a sin for which you need to repent by turning your life's direction back to the Lord.
- Perhaps it is something you carry that has greater influence on your life than Jesus.
- Maybe it is something far more specific for you.

We know that for Christ-followers, Jesus has already taken all our sins upon Himself and has forgiven them—all we have done and all we will do. At the same time, the events of Holy Week invite our honest reflection and our spiritual growth. These events give us a unique opportunity to pause and ponder what the Lord has done, the ways our hearts have turned away from Him, and how we might better align our lives with His way.

Nailing our sins and our surrender to the cross is a symbol that allows us to express to our Lord in tangible ways our sadness for the hurt we have caused Him and our desire to follow Him in every way and through every circumstance—even the ones we don't fully understand.

There is forgiveness and freedom at the foot of the cross. Listen to this story again and be aware of what the Spirit may be saying to you.

Jesus was taken to the High Priest's courtyard. Peter and John arrived a little later. It was here Peter denied that he knew Jesus and it was here that he heard the rooster crow. Luke records that Jesus turned and looked straight at Peter (Lk 22:61). Peter remembered what Jesus had said to him, left the courtyard and wept bitterly.

From the courtyard Jesus was taken to Pilate, then Herod, then back to Pilate again. Where Jesus testified to the truth of His kingdom. Though Pilate saw no grounds for the death penalty, in the end, that is what he decreed. To prepare him for the cross, Jesus was brutally flogged. We pick up the story again in John 19:16.

The Crucifixion (merging all gospel accounts)

¹⁶ Then Pilate turned Jesus over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus away. As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross. They came to a place called Golgotha, (which means The Place of the Skull). ¹⁸ There, at about 9:00 in the morning, they nailed him to the cross. Two others were crucified with him, one on either side, with Jesus between them.

¹⁹ And Pilate posted a sign on the cross that read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."

²⁰ The place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek, so that many people could read it.

²¹ Then the leading priests objected and said to Pilate, "Change it from 'The King of the Jews' to 'He said, I am King of the Jews.' "

²² Pilate replied, "No, what I have written, I have written."

³⁵ After they had nailed him to the cross, Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing." And the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice. ³⁶ Then they sat around and kept guard as he hung there.

³⁹ The people passing by shouted abuse, shaking their heads in mockery. ⁴⁰ "Look at you now!" they yelled at him. "You said you were going to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days. Well then, if you are the Son of God, save yourself and come down from the cross!"

⁴¹ The leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the elders also mocked Jesus. ⁴² "He saved others," they scoffed, "but he can't save himself! So he is the King of Israel, is he? Let him come down from the cross right now, and we will believe in him!" ⁴³ He trusted God, so let God rescue him now if he wants him! For he said, 'I am the Son of God.' "

The soldiers mocked him, too... ³⁷ They called out to him, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"

⁴⁴ Even the revolutionaries who were crucified with him ridiculed him in the same way.

³⁹ One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed, "So you're the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself—and us, too, while you're at it!"

⁴⁰ But the other criminal protested, "Don't you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? ⁴¹ We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn't done anything wrong." ⁴² Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom."

⁴³ And Jesus replied, "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise."

⁴⁵ At noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock, for the sun had stopped shining. ⁴⁶ At about three o'clock, Jesus called out with a loud voice, "*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*" which means "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

²⁸ Jesus knew that his mission was now finished, and to fulfill Scripture he said, "I am thirsty."

²⁹ A jar of sour wine was sitting there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put it on a hyssop branch, and held it up to his lips. ³⁰ When Jesus had tasted it, he said, "Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands!" "It is finished!"