

## Sermon Good Friday 20

This is the day when we are called to remember the cruelty of the cross, of the crucifixion. But let's face it, most of us don't have associations like that with the Cross. Most of us think of the cross as a religious shape, a symbol, and not much beyond that. We don't think of it as a way to punish someone, as a way to kill a human being.

We think of the cross as a pretty thing, maybe even a piece of jewelry - brass or gold or silver. We wear crosses around our necks or as pins. We make crosses of palm branches. We make crosses with flowers. We may have one in the front yard of our church that someone will fill with flowers this Easter Sunday morning.

The people of Jesus' time didn't waste resources. Crosses were used again and again. Nobody cared if a criminal bled all over the dried blood of the last criminal. The concept of cruel and unusual punishment - well, that just wasn't a concept that bothered the ancient world much.

On our website I included a picture of a sculpture by Tim Holmes. If you can, take a look at it. It's called "Returning the Nails: Endurance." It shows a man with an outstretched arm holding three large nails. The nails were probably made of iron. They were too valuable to leave around after the criminal died. So after death, the nails would be torn from the body and returned to the executioner to be used again.

But interestingly, most historians agree that Jesus was probably tied to the cross. The Romans wouldn't have wasted nails on him or on the thieves who died with him. People died on a cross from suffocation, from asphyxiation, from being deprived of air as their hanging bodies crushed their lungs. That's probably how Jesus died.

It brings to mind an image far removed from pretty crosses, doesn't it?

The only thing beautiful about the death of Jesus was that he was willing to die. His life and death were acts of love. We know that pain is real. We know that as humans we can feel pain. Jesus' death on the cross was his final act as a human. He experienced pain just as we do. But unlike so many nameless humans who die everyday, he was meant to be remembered. And he has been, for over 2000 years.

We can't really understand Jesus' death. Was it an act of sacrifice? A sacrifice for our sins? Was it an act of intercession? Was it the final statement of his humanity? "I am here. I am real. I am one of you."

Or was it the first statement of Jesus as God? “I am here. I am real. I will always be with you.”

So here we are, looking at a man in the very depths of pain and loneliness. We are here at this time, in the Springtime of 2020 as people who are experiencing a very different kind of loneliness. But it is still profound.

Perhaps this year this is where we meet Jesus on this day. From our places of loneliness, our sense of strangeness as we feel the night fall on this strange Good Friday in the midst of a pandemic in the year two thousand and twenty. What’s next? What can we look forward to without our faith? Let us embrace Paul’s words to the Hebrews.

“Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, and (when we can, however we can) not neglecting to meet together, but encouraging one another, and all the more as we see the Day approaching.”

There will be Resurrection. That’s the promise.