

Christ Episcopal Church, Valdosta
“Jesus’ Throne of Grace” (Hebrews 4:14-16)
Good Friday: April 2, 2021
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In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

On Good Friday we always hear the account of the passion and death of Our Savior in the Gospel According to John. John, you may remember, was the one and only of Jesus’ twelve disciples who stood at the foot of the cross. John saw the blood trickle down and off Jesus’ beaten body into the bloody dust below. John heard Jesus’ increasingly labored breathing and increasingly more frequent gasps. John trembled along with Jesus’ mother Mary as she wept for her beloved son, and gazed back into the eyes of Jesus when he asked him to look out for her. John heard Jesus cry out “It is finished” and saw his chest collapse upon his final breath, and stayed there even after Jesus died. And later John saw the Roman soldier pierce the side of Our Savior and the blood and water flow out.

On Good Friday John watched and heard all of it. It is little wonder that of the four gospel writers John more than any other emphasizes again and again and again the love of God given all of us on Good Friday in the death of Jesus Christ the Son of God. John is the only gospel writer who recounts Jesus’ words to Nicodemus: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (John 3:16)—and Jesus’ words at the Last Supper: “Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35)—and Jesus’ words as they walked through vineyards on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane: “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love...No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:9 and 13). Only John recorded these.

We further see John’s emphasis on the love of God in Jesus Christ in his First Letter: “We know love by this, that (Jesus) laid down his life for us...In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins...we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent the Son as the Savior of the world...God is love” (1 John 3:16; 4:10, 14, and 16).

On their gorgeous and haunting 1969 song “Can’t Find My Way Home” by the British band Blind Faith Steve Winwood sings:

Come down off your throne and leave your body alone
Somebody must change
You are the reason I’ve been waiting all these years
Somebody holds the key
Well, I’m near the end and I just ain’t got the time
And I’m wasted and I can’t find my way home
I can’t find my way home...
And I’ve done nothing wrong but I can’t find my way home

That is what Jesus did for you and me. Jesus came down off his throne in heaven to be born into the world he created, only to be rejected throughout his entire earthly life—as John also wrote, “The world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him” (John 1:10-11). Jesus changed from being fully divine to being both fully divine and fully human, and Jesus is the reason we have been waiting all these years. Jesus, only Jesus, holds the key to our salvation and our eternal life.

This is good news for all those who in one way or another are near the end, good news for all those who one way or another “ain’t got the time” for things that don’t really matter, good news for all those who have been wasted by the world or wasted by their own bad choices or wasted by the actions of others, good news for all those who can’t find their way home. Although Jesus had done nothing wrong—nothing, ever—he left his throne in heaven to save the world, to save sinners like you and me, and to personally be the way home (John 14:6).

Today’s passage from the Letter to the Hebrews is a passage we also always read on Good Friday:

Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:14-16).

“We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses”...this is good news, but it begs some uncomfortable questions: What are *your* weaknesses? Where are the chinks in *your* armor? What is *your* Achilles heel? There are probably some things that immediately come to your mind—but if not, just ask someone who knows you well and they will be able to tell you (spouses are especially skilled at this). Speaking for myself, I have a veritable buffet of weaknesses, numerous chinks in my armor, and several Achilles’ heels. Yet scripture assures us that in Jesus Christ we have a High Priest who gets it—who knows all our weaknesses, knows all the chinks in our armor, knows all our Achilles’ heels, and rather than judging us about these things actually sympathizes with us...and gives us grace, abundant grace from his throne of grace.

When it came to the world, including you, on Good Friday Jesus chose love over judgment, Jesus chose grace over law. As John also records, earlier in his ministry Jesus plainly stated that his Heavenly Father had *not* sent him to condemn the world, but to save the world—not to condemn you, but to save you (John 3:17). “The Father judges no one,” Jesus later said, “but has given all judgment to the Son” (John 5:22). As Good Friday drew near Jesus further said, “Now is the judgment of this world...and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:31-32).

On Good Friday Jesus did just that: he took the judgement of the world, including you, upon himself—completely and comprehensively and eternally. As we just heard, as Jesus was dying on the cross he did not say, “It is almost finished” or “I have done my part now you need to do yours” but rather “It is finished” because it is. Out of love for you, Jesus took the judgment upon himself—and was indeed “lifted up from the earth” to draw all people, to draw *you*, to himself.

After his resurrection and ascension Jesus returned to his throne, his eternal throne from which he had come down save a world near the end, to save a world wasted, to save a world full of people who can’t find their way home.

And even now Jesus, still bearing his scars from Good Friday, sits upon his throne of grace and beckons you to approach with boldness...because God is love and God longs to give you grace to help you in your time of need.

Amen.