



# LIVING WORD EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Evangelical • Reformed • Catholic

## Sermon for Good Friday

Hebrews 10:1-25 &

St. John 19:1-37

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Last night we sat with Jesus and his disciples in the Upper Room as he first washed their feet and showed them what it meant to be a servant—settling the dispute amongst those bickering disciples over who was the greatest and who was the least. He who was without question the *greatest* among them—he who was God himself—stripped down to a towel, knelt on the floor, and washed their dirty feet, even washing from the feet of Judas the mud caked their from his trip to the chief priests to whom he sold out his master and friend. We saw St. Peter draw back from Jesus—“No Lord! *You* can’t wash *my* feet! If anything, *I* should be washing *yours*.” And yet Jesus insisted. If he couldn’t be a servant, he couldn’t redeem these men at the cross.

That night in the Upper Room, Jesus turned everything upside-down. After washing of the disciples’ feet—something totally inappropriate for a teacher to do to his students—he took the bread and the wine of the Passover meal and started referring to them as a *new sacrifice*. These men knew all about sacrifices. They knew all about bulls and goats and lambs sacrificed for sin, their bodies broken and their blood poured out before the altar. And yet Jesus took the bread and wine and said that it was *his* Body broken and *his* blood poured out—it was *him*

making a sacrifice for sin. From what the Gospels tell us, the disciples just didn’t get it. They really did want to follow Jesus, they wanted what he had to offer, but they didn’t understand yet what it was he was offering. Peter said “No” to Jesus washing his feet. When Jesus explained that he needed it, Peter wanted it—even wanted more of it (“Wash my whole body, not just my feet, Lord!)—but he still didn’t understand what it meant. He just trusted Jesus and wanted what he was offering.

Why Jesus didn’t just come out and tell the disciples in plain Aramaic that he was going to die for them, that he was going to rise on the third day, and that after fifty days he would ascend to heaven and send them his Holy Spirit, we can only guess. Why did he have to explain it all in what, at the time, were riddles and oblique references? I think he revealed things that way because it left the disciples wondering, and when the clarity finally came at Pentecost it made the work of Jesus so much more dramatic for them.

When they went to pray at Gethsemane that night after supper, it’s obvious that despite the weight that was on Jesus, the disciples still didn’t get it. They knelt among the olive trees as Jesus went off a little way away to pray by himself. And as Jesus prayed nearby like he’d never prayed before, the disciples fell asleep. They had no idea what was happening. Jesus woke them up in time for Judas to come, leading a pack of Jewish soldiers who had come to take him away. Peter drew out his sword, ready for the attack, and cut off the ear of one of the soldiers. Maybe he thought that now was the time

Jesus, the conquering Messiah-King, was going to throw off his clever disguise of humility and start the revolution that all the Jews expected. Now was his chance! But it didn’t happen. In fact, Jesus actually healed the soldier and told Peter: “I can appeal to my Father and he’ll send twelve legions of angels. But if I did that, how would the Scriptures be fulfilled?”

The disciples ran away as the chief priest’s soldiers took Jesus away in chains. They figured it was over...just another guy who claimed to be the Messiah—not the first and certainly not the last. But Peter followed along to the high priest’s house and hung back in the courtyard. He watched the sham trial they put Jesus through. They condemned Jesus, and as the priests and soldiers spit on him and struck him, Peter gave up just like the other disciples had done a few hours before. Three bystanders noticed Peter in the crowd and recognised him: “Hey, you! You were with him. You’re one of his friends. You’re one of his followers.” And each time Peter denied knowing Jesus: “I don’t know what you’re talking about! You must be blind! I’ve never seen this man before!”

When it was morning, the Jews dragged Jesus to Pilate’s court. He was the Roman governor. The Jews weren’t allowed to execute anyone; the Romans had to do it. And so Jesus went through another sham trial before Pilate who caved into pressure from the Jews. He didn’t want a riot on his hands and the Jews were crying for blood—and not just blood—they were crying out for a Roman crucifixion. Pilate asked them, “But this man is King of the Jews?” And they shouted back, “No he’s not! We

have no king but Caesar!” The crowds who had hailed their Messiah on Sunday, turned against him on Friday. They wanted a conquering Messiah who would raise an army and drive out the Romans, but instead this wanna-be Messiah was talking about the Kingdom of God in men’s hearts. He even talked about becoming a sacrifice himself. The humility wasn’t a disguise to fool the Romans—he really was humble...a wimp...no Messiah here!

The Roman soldiers, the whole battalion, took Jesus to be scourged. They spit on him, they put a reed in his hand and a crown plaited of thorns on his head and mocked him as king, and then they beat him senseless. They led him away with two common thieves onto a nearby hill. They held him down on a cross while they nailed him to it with big spikes through his wrists and through his feet, then they raised the cross up and dropped it heavily into the ground. His mother and his friends watched as the blood poured from his hands, his feet, and his head. For three hours he hung there. Roman crucifixion was known for its agony. The shoulders were dislocated. As you hung there you couldn’t breath. To breath you had to put your weight on the spike going through your feet – alternating between the agony of asphyxiation and the agony of being nailed to a piece of timber. After three hours Jesus cried out in anguish to his Father, “It is finished.” And just to make sure he was dead the soldiers pierced his side with a spear to see the blood run out followed by a gush of water.

That evening Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate to claim the body of Jesus. They took it down from the cross, wrapped it in linen, placed it in a tomb and sealed it up.

Now I think the disciples *started* to understand what Jesus was talking about last night when he had talked about his body and blood being given as a new—as a perfect—sacrifice. In our epistle lesson from the tenth chapter of Hebrews, we read some more about the nature of Jesus’ sacrifice. The Law and the old sacrifices were but a shadow of the good things to come. “It can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. *For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins*” (Hebrews 10:1-4).

The blood of bulls and goats, sacrificed over and over, could only convict the people of sin as it pointed to the perfect sacrifice of Christ that had not yet been made. And so Hebrews 10 says that Jesus came to do “away with the first in order to establish the second. *And by that...we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all*” (Hebrews 10:9-10). The writer of Hebrews goes on to give us a vivid picture contrasting the old and the new: “Every priest [and he’s talking about the priests of the *old* covenant] stands *daily* at his service, offering *repeatedly* the *same* sacrifices, which can never take away sin. But when Christ

had offered *for all time* a *single* sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God...for by a *single* offering he has *perfected* for *all time* those who are being sanctified” (Hebrews 10:11-14).

Jeremiah wrote, “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds...I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.” And Hebrews reminds us, “Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin” (Hebrews 10:16-18).

When Jesus breathed his last and cried out, “It is finished,” *it was* finished. Whereas in the old covenant the priest laid the sins of the people on the bulls and goats sacrificed *repeatedly* on the altar, Jesus, our great High Priest, took our sins upon himself and died the death that we deserved. The old sacrifices were imperfect. First, they were just brute animals, and second, those animals didn’t offer their lives willingly. But in the shed blood of Christ we find perfection—God Incarnate shed his own blood and he did of his own free will. For that reason, there’s no longer any need for more sacrifices. Jesus did it once and for all. The old covenant called for the sinner to humbly lay his sins on that animal sacrifice, but that bull or that goat on the altar of the Temple was a sign given by God—it was God’s finger pointing to Jesus Christ—pointing to the Cross. No more do we bring an *annual* sacrifice to the Temple; now the humble sinner need only trust in the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ on the Cross.

When Jesus breathed his last and gave himself up to God, the Temple served its last function in redemptive history. Under the old covenant the Holy of Holies—the Most Holy Place—was where the presence of God resided visibly for the people, resting on the Ark of the Covenant. And yet the people weren't allowed into that place—into the direct presence of God. Only the High Priest was allowed there and then only once a year. No sinful human being could enter the presence of God and the priest only did it to make an annual sacrifice for sins—and he did so only after a series of purification rituals for himself. Nobody went there, because sinners can never enter the presence of a holy, just, and righteous God without standing condemned.

But when Jesus made his once-for-all sacrifice on the cross that day—as he breathed his last and pronounced, “It is finished”—the heavy veil that separated the Holy of Holies from the people was torn in two from top to bottom. By his death, Jesus Christ opened the way into the presence of the Father. Through Jesus Christ sinners can find perfect forgiveness and can now enter the presence of our holy, just, and righteous God *uncondemned*.

On the cross Jesus stretched out his hands; he stretched out one hand to all those who *had* trusted in him, seeing the future and coming Messiah as they made their sacrifices at the Temple. And with his other hand Jesus reached out to us, reached out to the Gentiles, to the nations who had never heard of the Messiah. On the Cross he reaches out with both hands, uniting both peoples to himself,

establishing his body by giving new life to dead and paralysed limbs through his shed body and blood. Jesus said, “When I am lifted up, I will draw all men to myself” (John 12:32). That's exactly what he did. In fact, it's exactly what he *still* does. He stretches out his hands to draw us in, to unite us to himself. Through his perfect sacrifice he offers perfect forgiveness of sin. Through his body and his blood he offers new and eternal life. Through his Holy Spirit he renews and regenerates hearts and minds and leads us on the path of holiness. And through his cross, he leads us through the torn veil and into the Holy of Holies—into the presence of God.