



## LIVING WORD EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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### A Sermon for Good Friday Hebrews 10:1-25 & St. John 19:1-37 Fr. William Klock

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Picture again the scene we read about in last night's Gospel: Jesus and the disciples gathered in that "upper room". Their feet were dusty from a day spent walking the streets of Jerusalem. There should have been a servant there to wash their feet. But, instead, Jesus took up the towel and pitcher of water and began to wash the dust, the grime, the dirt from their feet. *Even Judas*, whose feet were covered with dust from his journey to visit the high priest to betray Jesus. Jesus washed even that dust from the feet of his betrayer. Here was truly the Messiah, the suffering servant who came to wash his people clean from their sins. Peter drew back. "No Lord! You can't wash my feet! If anything, I should be washing yours." But Jesus insisted. This is what he'd come to do.

Jesus turned everything upside-down. After washing the disciples' feet—something totally inappropriate for a teacher to do for his disciples—he took the bread and the wine of the Passover meal and started talking about 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 to purify the people from the impurity of their sins, to make them fit for God to draw near. And yet Jesus now took the bread and wine and said that it was his body broken and his blood poured out—that they were all on the verge of a new exodus, but this time he would be the Passover lamb, his body and blood would be broken to free them from the slavery of sin and death. The disciples

didn't understand. Not at this point. Picture them looking at Jesus and looking at each other with confusion. What was he trying to say about the Passover? 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. When Jesus had tried to wash Peter's feet, Peter had indignantly refused, but Jesus explained that he needed it—that if we wanted any part in his master, this washing was essential. Of course, then Peter did want it—he wanted even more of it ("Wash all of me, not just my feet, Lord!")—but he still didn't understand what it meant. He just trusted Jesus. This was the Messiah. Peter wanted what was coming... whatever that might be.

After supper Jesus took his friends to the garden of Gethsemane to pray. Even after the foot washing and that last supper and all Jesus' talk about servants and sacrifices, they still didn't understand. They had no idea what was going to happen. They knelt among the olive trees as Jesus went off a little way away to pray by himself. And as Jesus prayed like he'd never prayed before, the disciples drifted off to sleep. They had no idea that something was about to happen that would change the world forever. Jesus woke them up in time for Judas to return, 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, was going to throw off his clever disguise of humility and start the revolution that everyone 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?" I can only imagine just how much more confused Peter was at that point.

And the disciples ran away as the chief priest's soldiers took Jesus away

in chains. They figured it was over. Chalk Jesus up as yet another failed Messiah. But Peter wasn't ready to give up on his friend, so he followed along to the high priest's house to see what would happen. 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 recognized 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!" It wasn't just Judas. By morning Jesus had been betrayed and denied by his closest disciples and friends. All of them.

And in the morning, the Jews dragged Jesus to the court of 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 to their pressuring. 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!" That had to be the most unJewish thing ever shouted by a crowd. I expect that shout left Pilate utterly speechless. If they'd all suddenly began feasting on roast pig he couldn't have been more surprised. I expect it had Jesus in tears. He knew, just as they knew, that the Lord was Israel's king, not Caesar. But they were so angry with him, they were so set on their rejection of Jesus the Messiah, that they would do the unthinkable and declare their allegiance to Caesar instead. On Sunday the crowd outside the city had hailed him as King, but now their voices were drowned out by this great hoard calling for his blood. Not wanting trouble, Pilate gave them what they wanted.

His 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 violent thugs, revolutionaries, very possibly from Barabbas' gang. On a hilltop just outside the city, the soldiers held Jesus down on a cross while they nailed him to it with 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 his blood poured and as he struggled for breath. For three long hours he hung there. Roman crucifixion was known for its agony. The shoulders were dislocated. Hanging, you couldn't breathe. So you pushed yourself up, putting all your weight on the spike through your feet to gasp for air—alternating between the agony of asphyxiation and the agony of being nailed to a piece of timber. Some men lasted for days like that. Jesus had been abused so badly, all it took was three hours. He cried out to his Father—in relief, in exhausted victory, “It is finished.” And just to make sure he was dead, John says the soldiers pierced his side with a spear. Blood and water gushed out from the wound. Not what anyone would normally expect, but a detail noted by John. Maybe to stress the reality of Jesus' body, because there were those at the time John wrote who claimed that Jesus' body had only been an illusion. As John saw blood pour from Jesus' side, he couldn't help but remember the blood pouring from the animals sacrificed in the temple, and as the wind sprinkled Jesus' blood on the group gathered at the foot of the cross, John remembered standing in the temple as the priests sprinkled the blood of bulls and goats on him and the gathered sons of Israel. Purifying them from the stain of sin and death.

The clouds darkened the sky. The earth shook. The great, heavy curtain

in the temple that closed off the holy of holies, the place of the Lord's presence, was violently torn in two. The graves gave up their dead, who went walking through the streets of Jerusalem. Something remarkable had happened and everyone noticed, but no one understood—except maybe that centurion who confessed, “Surely this man is the son of God!” Despite all that, the city was quickly back to its business. Jesus' friends wept in sadness or in anger, and they went home to lie low lest the authorities come after them next.

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.

Maybe now the disciples started to ponder what Jesus said 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 the Messiah 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 Messiah Jesus 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 the Messiah 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 fell short. They could cleanse the people from the impurity of their sins, but the blood of bulls and goats could never deal with the sin itself. That's the difference between the old sacrifices and the perfect sacrifice of Jesus. In the shed blood of Jesus we are purified so thoroughly that, in the Holy Spirit, God himself can live in us, renewing our hearts, writing the law—once carved on tablets of stone—now the Spirit writes that law of perfect love on our hearts.

When Jesus breathed his last and gave himself up to his Father, 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 the Lord 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 the Lord. Only the high priest was allowed there and then only once a year. No sinful human being could enter the presence of the Lord 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.

But when Jesus made his perfect 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. By his death, Jesus opened the way into the presence of the Father. Through Jesus sinners now find perfect forgiveness and, through God's indwelling Spirit, they become the new and perfect temple.

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, reaches 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 life-giving 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 very presence of God.