

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

Good Friday – April 7th 2023

Isaiah 53:3-12

LIFE THROUGH DEATH

We may all be able to remember our first experience with death up close; that time when we moved from having known of people who had died, to knowing people who died, and even having a close relationship with them. Some people would say it's an experience that brings us into a confrontation with the realities of life. The first experience I had with death was when my grandfather died when I was seven years old. I remember being sad about it, but it was really not something that hit me all that hard. I was fortunate that it was another 17 years until my next close experience with death when my grandmother died. Now it was different. Now I asked the question of why did she have to die then. Now I really noticed her loss. Now I really started to think about the things which would have been different if she was still alive. Now, more than it had previously, death had invaded my life, and death brought hurt. I remember at that time dealing with a new kind of pain and level of grief which I didn't know I could feel. I felt that her death had left a large hole in my life, one that at that time I felt would always be there. Now, I had to deal with death up close.

On Good Friday, we deal with death up close. We stand though not before the coffin of a parent, grandparent, child, sibling, spouse, or a friend; we stand at the foot of the cross of Jesus. We experience the reality of death, His death. We realise that death does come close, to each of us. Death is an enemy. It would be cold and dark and empty, except that Jesus has come close to us and faced death for us. His death changes our experience of death. Through His death comes life. Now we stand before His cross and feel the impact of His love for us as He experienced death up close.

To live in our world means that death is a part of our life. We've all experienced death in different ways, and have had different reactions to it. There is the sudden death of a child which may cause us not just to question God, but to become angry with Him. There is the death of a spouse, family member, or friend which leaves us feeling very lonely in our lives. There is the sudden death which takes us by surprise and leaves us feeling that there were so many things we wanted to say to and do with that person. And there is the slow death which gives us the time to say our goodbyes and causes us to thank God for releasing that person from their suffering, but nonetheless leaves us with a feeling of sadness and loss. It can come in many ways, but it does come, and it touches all of our lives in some way. The sky can be blue, the sun bright, the birds singing happily, and then we receive a phone call with the bad news, and darkness descends very suddenly. We all react to death differently. Some don't like to talk about it all, and some don't mind discussing it. To be human is to live a life which is fragile, and can be taken from us or someone close to us at any time. And death would leave us terrorised and empty except for what took place one Friday. We call it Good Friday, the day when Jesus experienced death, and through that death brought us life.

The prophet Isaiah painted a picture of what this Friday would be, a long time before Jesus faced it. He described a Saviour, a Suffering Servant, who would stand in our place and experience death for us. Isaiah writes, 'He was condemned to death without a fair trial. Who could have imagined what would happen to him? His life was taken away because of the sinful things my people had done.' (v. 8) For all of us who have disobeyed God, death is justice; it's the punishment demanded by our just God. But now the Suffering Servant comes near, the One of whom Isaiah also writes, 'He was hated and rejected; his life was filled with sorrow and terrible suffering. No one wanted to look at him. We despised him and said, "He is a nobody!"' He suffered and endured great pain

for us, but we thought his suffering was punishment from God. He was wounded and crushed because of our sins; by taking our punishment, he made us completely well. All of us were like sheep that had wandered off. We had each gone our own way, but the LORD gave him the punishment we deserved.’ (v. 3-6) This Servant, our Saviour, came not to run away from death, but to suffer it for us. He suffered punishment which was not His, but is ours, but He willingly suffered it in our place. He was blameless and innocent, but He willingly paid the price which was ours to pay.

What a comfort it is to know that we have a Saviour who both knows and experiences what we go through. Just over three months ago we celebrated Christmas, rejoicing then that God loves us so much that He was born among us. But the beauty and magic of that Christmas event is not just that Jesus was born to join us in life, He was also born to join us in death. That tiny helpless baby in the manger we all adore each Christmas, is the same person who we remember on this day was cruelly put up on the cross to die, an innocent man dying for the sins of others. He is not a distant God, viewing us from afar and staying far enough away to avoid the pain and suffering. He comes to be close to the pain. He comes to carry us in our sufferings and our troubles. He comes to walk with us in our sorrow. He comes to be near us in everything we go through, to face it all with us. Immanuel, God with us, isn’t just with at His birth, but also in His death.

Our Suffering Servant knows death up close, like we do. He felt the bite of death. He winced at the piercing of the nails. He endured the taunting of the crowd and the unjust accusations. He joined Himself to the fate we should have suffered. In His death He carried our sorrows. He came to the scene of our guilt. He stretched out His hands to receive our sin. He left nothing undone. From the cross He declared, ‘It is finished!’

(John 19:30) All was completed; the obligation was paid. The debt was settled. God's plan to save all people was accomplished.

On this day, we stand at the foot of the cross to view the crucified Jesus who died for us. But, for us, something has changed. In fact, because of Jesus, everything has changed. We can now see death as being defeated, overcome. We can see past Good Friday's moment of grief to Jesus' victory. We call this day Good Friday because we know what it means for us now. Jesus experienced death for us, and through that death He brought life for all who believe in Him. As Paul writes in 1st Corinthians, and we say as part of our funeral service, "Death has lost the battle! Where is its victory? Where is its sting?" (1 Cor. 15:54b,55 CEV) Because He lives, we too shall live. Today we look to the cross when Jesus experienced death, our death. But we know that this is not where it finishes. Jesus dying for us is only the first half of the story. Soon, it will be Easter, where He, and therefore we, will have new life forever. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- Take some time to think about the events of Good Friday. If you can, have a read of John chapter 17 in full. Are there any parts of this story, something someone said, something which happened, which particularly stand out for you?
- Jesus came to take our punishment, to die the death which should have been ours. Spend some time reflecting on and praying for God's forgiveness for your sins. Pray for those you know you need to stop doing but feel unable to do so.
- Through His death, Jesus has brought us life. What does this mean to you? How does it change your life now?

Pray: thank God for the great sacrifice He made in sending Jesus to die for our sins. Ask God to help you to both always remember His forgiveness and to lead you to live as one of His people.

*Pastor Andrew R. Koehler
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