

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera, QLD

Good Friday – 29th March 2024

John 19:28-30

GOD CAME TO SAVE US

It's hard to imagine how Mary was feeling, as she stood at the foot of the cross, watching her son die. When a child is born, whether we are parents, grandparents, brothers or sisters, aunts or uncles, cousins, whatever, the way we tend to look at that baby is as a bundle of potential with so many hopes and dreams ahead of them. To have that life cut short for whatever reason is not something we want to foresee. I have been with people who have lost one of their children, both as a child and an adult, and it's not something I ever want to go through myself. I remember one father saying, 'It's not natural, your child should be burying you', and a friend at the funeral of his ten-year-old son, 'you were meant to be the one speaking at my funeral'. And here is Mary, standing at the foot of the cross, watching her son die. She knew He was special; she more than anyone knew His birth was a gift from God. She knew that both His childhood and His short adult life were different; this was no ordinary person, there was always something different, special, about Him. But from the times she is mentioned in Jesus' adult life we know that she and His siblings didn't really understand what He was doing, the path He must take. And now, here she is, at the foot of His cross while He hangs dying. Amidst the sounds of groaning from those who are dying, the smell of a place of execution, the feeling of both fear and anger from those around her, and caught up in her own unfathomable sadness and grief, here she now is. Despite all she knew about Jesus from before His birth, how could she have thought it would come to this?

Some of you may remember that at our last Christmas we had the theme; God came down. We focused on the humility and lowliness of the birth of Jesus, the Son of God, the King of the world, in a place where animals slept and were fed. And now, just three months later for us, but 33 years later for Him, we come to how this part of His story ends; His death on a cross. A cross; a symbol of

pain, suffering, and punishment. If we thought that birth in a stable and manger were low, death on a cross is even lower. It was a method of execution the Romans liked to use to show how powerful they were, it told the world how weak and helpless those were who were hanging and dying, and how strong and powerful the ones who had put them up there. No wonder that for Mary, for the disciples most of whom couldn't even stand to be there, and for all those crowds who had followed Him over time, this was not the ending they had been expecting.

And yet, this cross had been before and over Jesus since His birth; in fact, long before that. As God, Jesus knew why He had come down to us; for this purpose. He knew that right back when the first sin had broken the perfect relationship between God and His people, that since that time God had been promising to send the Saviour. Unlike our own birth and that of our children, His story began not with His birth, or even with His conception, but back at the beginning of the relationship between God and His people. It was a promise God kept making for thousands of years; that the Saviour, God Himself, would come to live, die and rise again, to pay both the price for our rebellion and also to open the way for us to have eternal life with Him. The perfect sacrifice who died for the sins of us all. Dying on the cross so the debt of our sin could be repaid. Rising again on the third day so that because He lives, we too may live. As Mary had known from the beginning of her role in His life, even though she didn't fully see how it would end, this would be no normal story.

The final words that Mary and maybe some others of those there heard this innocent man, the Son of God who is God Himself, utter as He hung dying on the cross? 'It is finished!' Everything is done. It's hard to know how many people would have heard Him say this. It would have undoubtedly been noisy as the Roman soldiers went about their violent and bloody work, those also dying there groaning in pain, and family and friends gathered round calling out their love. Remember too that although we often picture just three people being crucified that day, most likely it was many more; the Romans liked to put on a show of their power, and at this time they had a large audience. Also, although for us Jesus is the focus of this day, most of those there would not have paid much attention to one who to them was just another criminal, but they would have been more worried about doing

their job, or attending to their own family and friends. And after hanging there for three hours, dying, it is likely Jesus didn't have much voice left. So, His final words, 'It is finished!' were probably said not that loudly, and most likely just heard by those who were right near Him.

But those words ring so strongly as a statement of all that His death means for us. Finished is the plan God had been promising to open the way for us to come back to Him. Finished is our separation from God which we can't begin to get over. Finished is the power of the devil over us. Finished is the power of all those things, both from within and outside of us, which take us away from God.

'It is finished!' What do those words, spoken nearly two thousand years ago, mean for us today? If we place ourselves with Mary standing at the foot of the cross, what comes to us as we hear, and remember those words? What guilt, hurts, struggles, frustrations, weaknesses, can you lay at the cross, knowing that they are dealt with in Jesus' words? Not that all those things will suddenly go away in your life, but their power to keep you away from God and take you to eternal death are finished. We, like Mary, look in sadness at the cross, and in all that Jesus did for us there. But we also, being able to put it into the big picture and knowing everything which was to come, look there with thankfulness, with hope, and with joy. That cry of Jesus, 'it is finished!', means that our new life with God has now begun.

We move from our Christmas theme of 'God came down', to 'God came to save us'. This is what Jesus accomplished. This is what He was referring to in His dying cry, 'It is finished!' We also stand before the cross, not just today but every day, seeing Jesus giving up His perfect life in suffering and death for us. But for us, now, this is something to be thankful for. In the forgiveness, the new life, the freedom from guilt, being able to live our lives in Him, which He won for us on the cross, we can now have our hope and our joy. In His journey from the manger to the cross this is what Jesus has come to accomplish; that God came save us. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- Try to imagine what it would have been like for Mary and those others who watched Jesus die on that first Good Friday. What feelings would they have had?
- What does the cross mean for you? What feelings do you have when you think about Jesus suffering and dying for us there?
- ‘It is finished!’ When you think of those last words of Jesus, what do you think of? Is there something you particularly apply them to for you? If there is any part of your life which you particularly struggle with: a temptation, holding a grudge or hurt, feelings or guilt or failure, struggles in your faith, etc, hand them over to God.

Pray: thank God for all that He accomplished for us in Jesus’ death on the cross. Ask Him to help us to rely on this death and forgiveness and strength it now gives us in our lives.

Pastor Andrew R. Koehler
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