

Sermon Good Friday Apr 2 2021  
Redeemer, Ramsey  
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Grace, Mercy and peace from God our Creator, and from our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear friends, on this Good Friday of Holy Week, I want to ask you to indulge me in this exercise.

I want you to think of a dream that you had for your life that never came true. For many of us, I suspect such dreams that never came true are rooted in our youth. I have plenty of examples, but I'm just too timid or ashamed to admit them to you. But they are there. And when I'm honest with myself, there is some grief that I experience because of them.

As we get older, we move on from such dreams in our lives even though they may continue to haunt us. Or perhaps we are still hanging on to some dreams that will not die, which we keep dreaming of even though their truth is slipping further and further away from us over time.

Here is my point in bringing these to your mind. There is something in us that will never admit a dream is dead until we know it's been buried. There are dreams of work and career, dreams of fame and fortune, dreams of relationship and friendship, and dreams of identity and belonging. On some level we all know dreams like these, the ones that don't come true, and their death is always a source of long-term grief in our lives. Hopefully, we find grace in life and learn to trust in it. With it, we can appraise our dreams and their demise, and then become grateful for the other dreams that have been fulfilled, usually in ways that we never imagined.

This is how I imagine the experience of the disciples on that fateful day, on which Jesus was brought before the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem, and then handed over to the Roman governor, to be tried, tortured, and crucified like a criminal. When the disciples beheld what happened to Jesus, this incredibly horrifying reversal of fortune, their own hearts were cut to pieces, their hopes dashed, their dreams destroyed.

And in the process, they themselves were shown the naiveté of their own dreams of power and control. We know they harbored such dreams because the Gospel accounts admit as much. Previously in Mark's gospel, after Jesus predicted his death for a third time, (Mark 10:37) James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come up to Jesus and asked him if they can sit next to Jesus in his glory, one on his right and one on his left. They are dreaming of glory. They are dreaming of a physical kingdom, which someone will have to take care of after Jesus dies. They ask to be the ones to step into the void. Jesus tells them they don't understand what they are asking.

Peter has a similar experience of warning from Jesus. We know Peter was very eager to show his loyalty to Jesus. When in Matthew 16, Peter tried to correct Jesus about his prediction of his death, Peter insisted that that would never happen to Jesus. Jesus turned around and called Peter Satan. Later, when in John 21:18, Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves him, Peter is frustrated by the repeated question. Then Jesus tells him that when he was young, he could dress himself and go and do what he wanted, but that when older, people will control him, dress him and lead him where he does not want to go. John's gospel account tells us that Jesus was indicating how Peter would die a martyr's death.

So we know the disciples had dreams for the outcome and ending of Jesus ministry that did not match the reality of God's plan. And we know from our side of the story that although understandable, they were deeply misguided. Can we now admit that we too harbor our own dreams of power and glory where God's judgement and will are concerned?

After the events of Jesus' arrest, trial, and execution, we should find ourselves in the same situation as the disciples, that at the foot of the cross we too have nothing to offer, nothing left to fight with. We too are completely unprepared for the death of our dreams of glory.

Thus, the detail that the gospels add, about Jesus' body being laid in a tomb, is a real exclamation point stuck on the end of Jesus' crucifixion and death. The text of the Gospel of John says that a man named Joseph of Arimathea was granted permission to take Jesus' body and bury it. It was a new tomb, freshly dug out of the rock, in a garden nearby the scene of his crucifixion. Joseph placed Jesus' dead body in that tomb, and sealed it shut.

Dead. And buried. A dream extinguished, like the light of a candle. And the disciples were left now with the pain of this loss. Things that they had allowed themselves to believe in, to imagine, to indulge their hearts and minds in, whether accurately or naively, all of the sudden were dead. And not just dead. Dead and buried.

This detail is now part of our apostolic tradition, and expressed in the Christian creeds, that "For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried." It emphasizes the death of Christ, the death of God, the death of our dreams of who God is or who we think God should be.

But it also sets the stage for the great reversal of Easter, the resurrection of the Lord of life. It sets up God's self-revelation about who God is and who God always will be, the God who transforms us into a people of faith and hope, and who transforms our world into the field and object of his saving grace. Because Jesus was buried, our ideas about God must die too. Because he was buried, our dreams of glorious discipleship must die too. Because Jesus was buried, our God of glory must die as well.

Dear friends, we know the ending of this story. And this should make a difference to us. This emphasis on Jesus' death and burial in the Gospel accounts reverses itself on Easter morning, in an unimaginable change of fate. Now, because Jesus has been raised from the dead, we have faith that his eternal life has become ours. In Baptism, we too have died with him, by baptism into his death, so that we might be raised to new life with him, now and forever.

When we follow in faith the experience that our Lord endured, his Passion, it recreates us as a people of the cross. Because of his life, death, burial, and resurrection, we are no longer a people longing for human glory, a people who harbor dreams of glory, or who seek a God of glory. We become more mature in our faith, being able to resist the temptation to believe in the false security of easy fixes, shiny idols, and vain beliefs of human power or glory.

Rather, we are recreated to be able to see the truth of God's sacrificial love in the world around us, as it is. In the shadows of life, we can see the God who died for us. In the despair of the world we live in, we can see the God who shed his own

blood for us. In the sadness or injustice, or deep sin of our world, we see Christ crucified. His death is the death of our sin, the death of our grief, the death of our pain, the death of our despair. Dead and buried, and always ripe for resurrection.

We have hope in the face of these things because God has been here before us. And in the good news of Easter, we stand up in faith and greet God's new morn. We have hope in the justice and mercy of God. We can love as God in Christ has loved us. Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. Thanks be to God. Amen.