

"Near to ME"on Good Friday

John 19: 16-37

Holy Week 2020 is not one that any of us will forget. We live in a physically distanced world now. Your view of that world is probably shaped now, maybe more than ever, by the view from your windows at home. Many of you have spoken or written to me recently, and we have talked about how hard it really can be to feel this "alone".

As I have said though before, when we consider God's Creation, and the story of it in Genesis 1 and 2, our feelings of loneliness really start to make sense. Because if you read that story again, you will see the familiar parts --- the days listed, and God's works of Creation listed on those days --- and at the end of each day, of course, God sees what He has made and calls it "good".

- ++ God is not being prideful, nor boasting in His own work, although He could. God is simply affirming that what He has made is what He meant to make, and that because it is part of His loved Creation, it is good. It is worthwhile. It is beautiful and it belongs to Him.
- ++ You know though that God said one thing was NOT good. And that one thing was "that man should be alone". There you have it. God stating for us in the Bible's second chapter, that isolation is not normal nor natural for human beings. Your loneliness makes sense.
- ++ And what is more, when this season of disease and separation from one another ends, your reunions with family and friends ---- and rest assured my friends, these reunions WILL come ---- they will be heartfelt and joyful, because you'll be around the people God has placed in your life once again --- right where HE designed you to be.

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Even still, we arrive at this Good Friday fully recognizing that for us to be Near to God, for God to be Near to Us..... **"Near to Me"** as we have focused our messages for this Holy Week, it is Christ Himself who must first be ALONE. ***Christ Himself who must first take physical distancing to its most extreme measures***, because in His alone-ness, and only in that, do we find fulfillment and eternal re-connection with our Father who is in Heaven.

You remember what we said in the message last week, on Palm Sunday..... Holy Week gives a fascinating story that we can view through the lens of “distancing”. In short, Jesus becomes more and more distanced from others throughout Holy Week, ***precisely so that*** we might never be distanced from Him!

Palm Sunday >>>> Jesus is with a **large, cheering crowd!**

Maundy Thursday >>>> Jesus is with the **twelve disciples** for Passover.

Good Friday >>>> Only **Mary & John** and few others remain at Calvary.

Friday/Saturday >>>> Jesus is **alone** at the Cross, alone in Death.

We have truly arrived, in this Good Friday, at the most alone and isolated point in Jesus' life. I mentioned Genesis earlier because it's been that long, it's been from the first man Adam up until now on the Cross, that any human being has ever been this alone.

Alone. Abandoned. Suffering. Beaten. Crucified. Suffocating.

On Good Friday, we consider more closely what actually happened to Christ on the Cross. That He was all of those things, and that at the same time He bore the entire weight of sin on His now beaten and bloodied back.

The entire weight of sin.....which in the eyes of a Holy God is a repulsive sight, one that He can have no part of. And so "alone" becomes the order of the day, because Christ in His great love for each of us not only bears all sin for all time.....but He bears it ALONE.

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And let us be truthful with ourselves, too. We need someone to meet the full price for sin, and that full price includes death and separation from God. That price has not changed since the Garden of Eden, *but neither has the mercy of God.*

This is why Good Friday is called “Good”. Because the price of sin has not changed, but the One remitting payment is not you or me.

God is not interested in watching you try to pay the full price (or any of the price!) for your sin. He is not interested in watching me try to live a good enough life to earn His love and eternal life with Him. We simply are not capable of it..... we are, as we confess each week together “sinful and unclean”.....and yet God intends, through the alone-ness on the Cross of Jesus, to remedy that, and brings us to Himself as only He can.

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Good Friday and the total alone-ness of Jesus is God's sure and certain Word that you will never be alone.

Jesus' abandonment by His Father gives reassurance to you, the entire body of Christ, that you will never be abandoned.

His suffering is no guarantee that you will never suffer. But, it is a part of the guarantee that you will never suffer by yourself, because God who once turned His back to His own Son, for a time, will never turn His back from you.

This is the miracle of God's work in this Holy Week. At the most alone looking, and at the most alone feeling time in Jesus' earthly life and ministry, God is still working feverishly to ensure that you, His beloved child, His son or daughter, His precious Creation.....will never, ever be alone.

And in the last breaths of Jesus on the Cross, you have newfound breath and life in the Father who Created you. In the Son who Redeems you. And in the Holy Spirit, who lives in you, even unto eternal life.

The Story does not end at this lonely Cross of Jesus. The best news is yet to come.

In the name of the Crucified Savior Jesus, Amen.