



SERMONS THAT WORK

Good Friday

The Hour Has Come

[RCL] Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Psalm 22; Hebrews 10:16-25 or Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9; John 18:1-19:42

The hour has come.

For much of John's Gospel, it was not the hour. It was not the hour when Mary, his mother, told Jesus about wine running out at the wedding. It was not yet the hour when Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman at the well. It was not quite the hour, as Jesus preached and healed and made his way toward Jerusalem.

But the hour finally came; it arrived as Jesus said it would. The hour of the Passover, the hour of Jesus' suffering, the hour of Jesus' sacrifice.

Yet, in this "hour," that time is warped. The hour unfolds and doesn't it feel like eternity? An eternity that passes like a millisecond. We know not how it began, only that it did, and suddenly too: an arrest, a trial, a betrayal, a flogging, an execution, a death, his death. The hour has come, the Lord confirms for us, when he offers: "It is finished," and he breathed his last.

It is an hour, a time, a moment, that our lives are forever marked by. How could it not change everything? It is during this hour when our humanity is revealed, exposed, unmasked.

Our humanity is revealed in Judas, who gives Jesus up to the authorities for a sack of silver. Greed or cowardice or infidelity, pick the one that fits you best. Which one is it: profit or fear or fantasy that has power over our lives?

We hear an echo of our own voice in Pilate's famous question: "What is truth?" a question reverberating throughout the halls of time. We ask the question in college seminars and in moments of confusion and as mass media empires regale us. We love to ask the question, but I wonder whether we're as interested in the answer.

We see in the mirror, looking back at us, a version of Peter, fearful or embarrassed or nervous to be associated with the recently arrested Jesus, denying our involvement, protesting our connection. We, too,

would rather not be related to those other Christians or with religious people in general, and so we never let Jesus' name slip off our lips. We deny our involvement.

And yet, there we are also, present with the women at the foot of the cross. Sorrowful and shocked. Overwhelmed and nauseated by the violence but unwilling to move away, bearing witness to his life and now his death, for where else could we go, to whom else could we go?

We see in Mary's eyes, our own anguish. We see in her exhausted body our own defeats. Our own nightmares made real. We see her, and we stand near her, we bear her weight, we hold her tight. We refuse to leave.

We, too, are Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, showing up at the eleventh hour, but showing up nevertheless, bearing the weight of his corpse, anointing his stiffening body with spices, wrapping it in linens, laying it, ever so gently and tenderly, tears rushing forth as his body is placed into the hewn rock.

What has this hour revealed us to be? Who have we been?

We are fickle and violent and tremendous and terrible and loving and paralyzed and overwhelmed and cowardly and touchingly gentle and intrepid and filled with an astonishing sorrow.

Because of the truth of ourselves, because of what we uncovered at this hour, and what we discover still to this day, our next question is all the more essential: What has this hour revealed about God?

If we are who we are, who has God been for us?

Jesus, in light of the many faces we humans can put on, shows us his face: a face set, with resolute conviction, toward our redemption. He is unmoored, resolute, afraid yet willing. He is pure love, love to the bitter end.

John's Gospel narrates Jesus' commitment to our redemption with precision and craft.

Jesus, in John's Gospel, is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. He is the one who will be killed for our redemption, a perfect sacrifice for the whole world. The timing of his death means everything. The hour is here, and Jesus is executed on the day of preparation, when all the unblemished lambs were sacrificed, in preparation for the Passover. He is the lamb who takes away the sins of the world.

And yet, there's more.

John's Gospel tells us that Jesus wears a tunic with no seams. A detail most of us quickly gloss over, given the powerful presence of the cross and the tomb. But let us linger on this seamless tunic for just a moment.

The soldiers cast lots for it; it was a prize to be won. It was likely beautiful, like he was beautiful, but it was also in one piece. A singular garment for a singular ministry. But more importantly, it is the tunic of a priest, the seamless garment that a priest would don on the Day of Atonement. Such a day was when Israel's sins were wiped clean, forgiven by the sacrifices made by a priest.

Jesus goes to the cross as a presider, as a priest. He presides over his own passion with tears and lamentation, with grief and pain, with struggle and anguish, but he presides, nonetheless. It is the liturgy of heaven on earth, it is the mass unfolding, and Jesus is our great high priest through it all. The one who offers earth to heaven and the one who brings heaven to earth. In such a liturgy, at such an hour, salvation has arrived.

Jesus goes willingly, he chooses this path, he drinks the cup, he faces the hour. He is not coerced but freely offers himself. A priest who offers a lamb, a priest who offers his own life.

This willingness on Jesus' part, this offering of himself, does not just reveal a piece of who God is. It reveals God himself. It is an apocalypse, the Temple curtain torn in two, it is heaven split open. We see on the cross the One who set the foundations of creation, the One who created humanity, the One who drew Israel into a Covenant, the One who spoke through the prophets, the One who came as babe, wrapped in cloth.

The One on the cross is the One we worship, the One who long ago, set out to save us, who has saved us, who continues to save us.

We are who we are, and thankfully God is who God is: Devoted to us, in love with us, one of us. As lamb and priest, as host and meal, as human and divine, Jesus spends every breath of his life, until the very last one, redeeming and forgiving and saving us.

The hour has come. It is here.

Come to the foot of the cross, then, and behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Behold our high priest who intercedes for us in heaven. Behold our Savior and our God.

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