

Title: Sitting at the Foot of the Cross

Date: 3/29/2024 (Good Friday)

Location: St. Alban's Episcopal Church

Service: 7pm Good Friday (Hybrid)

Readings: [Isaiah 52:13-53:12](#); [Philippians 2:5-11](#); [John 18:1-19:42](#); [Psalm 22](#)

Audio Link: <https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/st-albans-austin/episodes/Good-Friday-Sitting-at-the-Foot-of-the-Cross-e2hsqcg>

Video Link: <https://youtu.be/-ig4Yf-ogFk?t=2066>

O God, grant that the same mind be in us  
that was in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Holy Week is all about immersing ourselves in stories from Jerusalem, roughly two thousand years ago. On Palm Sunday, we heard about Jesus walking down the Mount of Olives and through Jerusalem. For the rest of the week, we hold these words of scripture in our hearts so that as we examine and experience the people and the world around us, we keep asking, "Whose restoration and wholeness do we envision in the Kingdom of God, and what does that look and sound like?"

Last night, having washed each other's feet, or having watched other people engage in the practice of Holy foot washing, we ended the service by watching the altar and this whole area being stripped bare. The final commandment of Jesus rings in our ears as we sit and watch with him, as we get into our cars and back on the road, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (Jn 13:34-35)

Tonight, we sit at the foot of the cross.  
Sitting at the foot of the cross reminds us that grief is holy.

In the Episcopal church, funerals are Easter services. It reminds us that just as Jesus was raised from the dead, the person who died shall also be raised. Believing in resurrection doesn't mean that there is nothing to feel sad about. This doesn't mean that our grief is unchristian. (BCP 507).

Our grief is a reflection of our gratitude for having had that person in our lives. Our sorrow is an extension of the love that still connects us, though they are on the other side of the veil.

I often hear people talking about getting through grief. Grief isn't something we can check off the list and call it done. I've heard it said that grief is like a wave, it may be big or small, rhythmic or unpredictable. Imagine trying to pack a wave in a box, it'd just keep seeping through or spewing out and soon we'd run out of hands to try to keep it all in.

Jesus suffered grief on the cross. Tonight we heard echoes of his last words on the cross, as recorded in the gospel according to Mark. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

As some have pointed out, this verse is a reference to Psalm 22, which ends on a more hopeful note. So maybe there is hope in these words, too. While that upswing **may** be in the back of the mind for the writers and the listeners, at this moment, that is **not** their focus. They are fully feeling the weight of this sense of alienation and abandonment. They don't gloss over the hurt by saying, "Well this is part of God's plan." They don't try to justify the pain by saying, "God doesn't give us anything we can't handle."

Through the reading of the Passion, we acknowledge that grief is heavy, and it is hard.

It is holy, but not because God created it to test us.

It is holy, because God set aside Godself to experience what we humans do to each other, what we humans do to ourselves.

It is good, but not because it is part of God's high-intensity-interval-training plan to develop our spiritual muscles and emotional endurance.

It is good, because it encourages us to strip away our protective and defensive layers and become vulnerable and honest so that we can see where the hurt is really coming from.

When we grieve, we take the first steps toward healing.

Tonight, we sit at the foot of the cross.

Sitting at the foot of the cross reminds us that we can't afford to look away.

Crucifixion wasn't a special method of torture the Romans invented for Jesus. This was common punishment for slaves and bandits and rebels.<sup>1</sup> They did this to make a point, to impose order and maintain control. They left up the vertical beams as an implicit and explicit threat to anyone who even thought about upsetting the balance of power.

Clearly, this didn't work out the way they hoped, because they had to keep crucifying people. Jesus wasn't the first, nor was he the last. The people who follow in his footsteps continue to take up that crossbeam, that yoke.

We don't do it because we want to suffer or because we want to die on the cross as he did. We do it because we want to love as he did. We do it because we want to live for something. We want our lives to stand for something. We seek to empty ourselves of the worldly illusions of power and authority as he did.

We recognize that imposing order through force or violence isn't ever going to fix brokenness. That will simply perpetuate and or transfer the cycles of trauma and brokenness.

We recognize that imposing order by taking away freedom isn't ever going to make us whole, as individuals or as a people. It means innocent people will keep being crucified, being lynched and locked away and killed in the name of our safety and security.

When we are honest and open about what's not working, what hasn't been working, we take the first steps toward wholeness.

Tonight, we sit at the foot of the cross.

Sitting at the foot of the cross reminds us to lean into the mystery of salvation.

Some people focus on the mechanics of salvation. Too often the story is told that humans sinned, so God had to sacrifice God's only Son to pay the price that God demanded. This is an attempt to work out the logic of how Jesus – life = eternal life for all those who have died, are dying, and will ever die.

Some people focus on the mathematics of salvation. Their goal is to figure out the point system assigned to sin and good deeds, confession and forgiveness, and the letter of the law and the spirit of the law. This way, they know where they'll end up. The downside is that some people who go through life with this framework will try to game the system, and some people will focus on telling other people what **they** need to do instead of looking in the mirror.

Rather than figuring out the mechanics or mathematics, perhaps tonight is a night we give ourselves over to mystery.

This is where God comes in. In the gospel according to John, Jesus' final words are, "It is finished."

"It is finished."

He has done everything that is humanly possible to do. Now it is up to God.

We don't earn salvation by being effective or efficient. We don't work our way to salvation by implementing best practices or hunting for the most helpful continuing ed classes. We don't qualify for salvation by reading a certain number of books or offering more help to others than we are willing to accept help ourselves.

Salvation is already ours, **and** the road to salvation goes through the cross.

When Christians talk about being Easter people, the focus is on resurrection. We jump ahead to living a new and shiny life in Christ. But the road to Easter goes through Good Friday. If we are going to be Easter people, we need to be Good Friday people, too.

So, we lament. We feel the full weight of our grief, for ourselves, our loved ones, and the world.

So, we let go. We examine and embrace the brokenness of the world so we can move toward restoration.

So, we live in this in-between place where we surrender everything to God **and** seek to respond to God's gifts of grace and love, where we accept that we are children of God **and** recognize that we aren't God, where we lay down our burdens **and** take up the yoke of Christ.

Tonight, we sit at the foot of the cross. Thanks be to God.

Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/crucifixion-capital-punishment>