

A SERMON FROM ST. MARK'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

NEW CANAAN, CONNECTICUT

BEHOLD: YOUR REAL FAMILY

Preached by Joshua Ashton Hill, Director of Children's and Youth Ministry

April 2, 2010 Good Friday Service, 12 noon and 7p.m.

John 19:1-42

A Note to the Reader:

As a sermon is primarily intended to be heard, not read, this sermon is written not in prose but in the "Aural/Oral" style. As such it seeks to achieve a conversational tone. Traditional "errors" in grammar and punctuation arise from the inscription of an Oral form.

I'm going to tell you a story about two of my friends but I want you to know that I've changed their names.

And that the scene I portray is my own reconstruction of the story as it was told 10 years ago.

I speak these words in the name of God: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen.

It was a beautiful October Saturday

And there they were:

Two of my college friends, Jim and Travis

A senior and a freshman, basically strangers carpooling home from a football game.

Now standing in the grassy median of the interstate

Amid broken glass and strewn car parts.

Where Travis' mother lay dead after her car

Collided with a reckless semi-truck.

Jim and Travis had been following one car behind.

They saw it all happen.

The collision. The swerving. The flipping and rolling.

Together they jumped out of the car

And ran to see if she was hurt, only to discover her lifeless body.

While the flashing lights of ambulances and patrol cars

Filled the blazing sky

They sat in silent grass and wept.

And the world sped by unaffected.

After that day, I noticed a difference.

I watched as Jim and Travis supported one another with great care and devotion.

They became involved in each other's families.

Invested in each other's lives.
Over the years they were roommates.
Each was in the altar party at the other's wedding.
What began as a carpool of strangers--
A senior and a freshman--
Was instantly transformed into a family.
They did not choose the events of that day.
But there they were in the midst of them together.
Behaving in that sacred way that only families do.
Weeping together. Holding each other.
Witnessing the unthinkable. Sharing the darkness.
To be vulnerable with another--
To distribute the pain, so that you hold it together--
Is to form a family bond that has no regard for
biological definitions of family.
That's what we're doing today on Good Friday.
Gathering together at the foot of the cross,
Witnessing unspeakable tragedy.
Unconscionable injustice.
Today we join in along with
the unlikely group of women and the beloved
disciple who stay with Jesus through it all.
Together with them, we share the darkness.
And Jesus looks down from that terrible, blessed
cross, just before he dies,
And to those gathered he says
You are established as a new family.

He guides them into their new roles, saying to his
mother
"Woman, behold your son." Your *new* son.
And to the disciple
"Behold your Mother." Your new mother.
Jesus has always challenged biological definitions
of family.
He does so to the very end.
For Jesus, all who do the will of God are family,
regardless of blood.
They are God's family--the Church.
The Church begins here. Today. At the foot of
the cross.
Because it is here and only here
That we can see and know the fullness of God's
love for us.
The measure of suffering God endures in pursuit
of a relationship with us.

Last night we celebrated the night in which
Jesus said goodbye to us at the Last Supper
And commanded us to love one another
As people who wash the feet of others.
So we did. We let him wash us. And we washed
others.
Many of us were touched by the giving and
receiving of such vulnerable love.
There is profound significance in that liturgy.
Because Thursday prepares us for what we will
see Friday.

It gives us tools for interpreting and remembering what happens today.

Today, the eternal Word of God, the blameless lover of souls

Takes the path of non-resistance

Endures public suffering. Allows himself to become a spectacle.

The hour is here. The Son of Man is lifted up.

For the whole world to see.

The cross of Jesus is meant to be seen.

Like a mirror, the cross provides a window into our souls.

The Passion of Jesus

Stands as an indictment -arrest-trial-conviction-sentencing-and execution

of Our greed; Our pride; Our violence; Our self-absorption; Our materialism; Our individualism, Our disregard for the other;

The cross reveals our true nature.

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But here's the Good part of Good Friday:

The cross also reveals God's true nature.

The cross is not only an indictment but also an invitation

An Invitation to repentance.

An invitation to belong to the solution rather than the problem.

A blessed way to obtain liberation from what is past.

Pardon and remission of sins, unity with the light inside each of us.

Today we gather to witness the cross,

To receive the revelation that is knowledge of self and knowledge of God.

And though the world is likely to speed by unaffected,

Those of us here cannot remain the same.

Having beheld together the full power of the cross--

The instrument of God's justice and love all in one--

We emerge today as a new family: The Church.

I invite you to turn over your shoulder.

Look around at this group assembled today at the foot of

The terrible, blessed cross of Jesus.

Look around.

Behold: Your real family.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.