

## Good Friday

Now I saw in my dream, that the highway up which Christian was to go, was fenced on either side with a wall, and that wall was called Salvation. Up this way, therefore, did burdened Christian run, but not without great difficulty, because of the load on his back.

He ran thus till he came at a place somewhat ascending; and upon that place stood a cross, and a little below, in the bottom, a sepulchre. So I saw in my dream, that just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble, and so continued to do till it came to the mouth of the sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more.

Then was Christian glad and lightsome, and said with a merry heart, "He hath given me rest by his sorrow, and life by his death." Then he stood still a while, to look and wonder; for it was very surprising to him that the sight of the cross should thus ease him of his burden. He looked, therefore, and looked again, even till the springs that were in his head sent the waters down his cheeks.

On this Good Friday, we with Christian have come to stand before the cross. On that first Good Friday the cross stood in stark relief upon a hilltop outside the city walls. There was nothing to distract the gaze from the execution in hand, the sacrifice offered. Even so, the Church calls to us to step away from our busy lives, turn off the phones, radios and televisions and stand before the cross.

Indeed, the Church does not simply call us out of our daily rounds but it calls us out of time itself. For the Church Kalendar brings us year by year through the great mystery of our redemption, adoption, sanctification and glorification. Even so, this day, we are called to stand among the crowds upon the ghastly hill of execution once more. There are the chief priests, the scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees. There are the Roman soldiers and the Centurion. And there stand Mary Magdalene, John the beloved disciple, and Mary Jesus' own mother. We are here, at the center of history, the focus of the ages, when the Son reconciled the world to the Father.

For it is the moment of moments, the fullness of time that we witness again today. God in his mercy would not allow his Creation to be destroyed by sin and slavery to the Devil and Death. The Father, in his eternal wisdom and providence would provide a lamb. The Holy and Undivided Trinity, three persons, one God were engaged to bring the dead to life. And we were dead in our trespasses and sins. For the Psalmist wrote, “No one knows how often he offends.” And again he writes, “Preserve me O Lord from my secret faults.” We are bound hand and foot, mind and heart, body and will by the chains of Adam’s sin. We are by nature fit for the grave and the just penalty of God’s holy law. Even so, St. Paul wrote the Ephesians, “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”

If we ceased our reading of that great Apostle at this very place we would be lost and without hope. For there is no hope for the objects of

God's wrath. Should he execute his judgment immediately or wait until we went to our graves our end would be the same. We would be without hope, without God in the world, without the covenants of promise. If we ceased our reading we would be right in despairing of God's care for his creation and do even as Job's wife urged, to curse God and die. But if we left off here we would have ceased too soon! For Paul continued, "But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ." And later he wrote, "Christ reconciled us to God through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end." We who were hostile to God and our fellowman; we who were objects of God's holy wrath; we have been reconciled to God by the shameful death of the perfect Son upon the cross.

So the cross stands unobstructed upon Calvary's hill, and it stands central in the halls of time, and it stands in the very midst of Scripture itself. Without exception the writers of the New Testament place the cross as fundamental to their worldview. It is the corner stone to the grand edifice which is God's massive work of creation and new creation. Would you know about the condition of mankind and his

sinful estate? Then look upon the cross and all its brutality. Would you know about the condition of the nations of this world and their rebellion against God? Then look upon the cross as an engine of destruction and oppression. Would you understand the just penalty due to sin and poured upon that sin by a righteous God? Then look upon the cross. Would you quantify the price paid to ransom lost men and women who were enslaved to sin, death and Satan? Then look at the king, rightful heir to the throne, who gave himself up to death upon the cross. Would you know the depth and breadth and height of God's love toward you, even in your wickedness? Then look upon his only begotten Son, his beloved, the one with whom he was well pleased – hanging upon the cross for you. Would you be conformed to the image of Jesus daily working for the salvation of the world? Then you must suffer your own cross for his sake and for your enemies; for the servant cannot be greater than the master.

My dear friends, let us keep this Good Friday with joy not with fear. Let us hear the last words of Jesus as pledges of his love and examples of his holiness and not as condemnation. For we have seen him suffer; we have heard his cries of anguish. But his is not defeat dear

friends, but it is his victory and the victory of those who love him and follow where he leads.

Then Christian gave three leaps for joy, and went on singing,

“Thus far did I come laden with my sin,  
Nor could aught ease the grief that I was in,  
Till I came hither. What a place is this!  
Must here be the beginning of my bliss?  
Must here the burden fall from off my back?  
Must here the strings that bound it to me crack?  
Blest cross! blest sepulchre! blest rather be  
The Man that there was put to shame for me!”