

Sermon: Good Friday (A)

St. Peter's, Norfolk

Text: John 18:1-19:42

Date: April 10, 2020

A trash truck driver named Craig Randall sometimes brought his “*work*” home with him- literally. For instance, there was that old-fashioned sewing machine he found one time. Then there were some interesting books he rescued from the city dump. And then there was that soft-drink cup that just happened to be worth \$200,000. Neither Randall, nor his fiancée really believed it until he drove his garbage truck up to the fast food restaurant and collected the check- \$200,000!

The twenty-three year old Randall had picked up the cup from a pile of trash while he was on his route in south Boston. He can't remember exactly where he found it- or maybe he just won't say. He had begun taking notice of those particular cups after he peeled a sticker from one cup a week earlier. “*I won a chicken sandwich off that one,*” he said. “*So I thought maybe, if I keep pickin up these cups and peeling off the stickers, I'd get some fries to go with it.*” This time, however, the sticker said, “*\$200,000 winner!*”

A treasure, lifted from a garbage heap- it seems like an appropriate theme for our worship on this Good Friday.....for after all, it was from the garbage heap of humanity that our salvation was lifted.

In his book, **Lift High The Cross**, Robert Morgan tells about a most unusual cross that stood on the lawn of a Dallas church during one Lenten season. The cross, which was about ten feet tall, created such a stir that pictures of it were carried by newspapers across the country and a television station in Dallas filmed it.

It was an ugly thing- made from weapons of violence and crime- most of which had been confiscated by the Dallas Police Department. There were guns and pistols, knives and bayonets, bullets, bombs, and broken glass. The cross itself rose out of the remains of an automobile that had been involved in a drunken driving fatality. An ugly barbed wire enclosure, like they use at prisons, surrounded the whole thing. It was an ugly sight- a thing of violence and death and it caused a lot of controversy.

The neighbors hated it. In fact, they started a petition to have it removed. Many of the church's own members were repulsed by it. They thought it was sacrilegious and had no place on the church grounds.

In his newspaper interview about the cross, the pastor simply commented, ***“The reactions to our Lenten cross are understandable. No one wants to be reminded of our sins and our inhumanity toward each other. But isn’t that the basis for the cross? Isn’t it our sins and our inhumanity toward each other that put Jesus on the cross?”***

It was a cross no one wanted to see....much like the cross of Jesus- that cross wasn’t a cross of guns and knives, bayonets and bullets; but it was a cross of suffering and shame...a cross of derision and death. It was a cross no one wanted to see. And yet there are things about that cross that need to be seen.

The first thing we need to see as we stand at the foot of Jesus’ cross is that **the cross was a place of shame**. It was intended to be that way. Those being crucified were the objects of derision. The Roman soldiers intended the experience to be physically exhausting and emotionally insulting. Made bloody by whipping and flogging, prisoners were marched through the streets to the cries of the crowds.

And so it was for Jesus. As he climbed the hill of Golgotha....as he ascended the ***“Place of the Skull,”*** the cries of some in the crowd were filled with anger and insult...all intended to shame him- ***“You saved others. Save yourself if you are the King of the Jews.”*** Once at the cross, the soldiers nailed him to the beams and so began a slow, brutal, painful death. Stripped naked, exposed for all to see, the cross was a place of shame- because that was what it was intended to be.

But Jesus’ extravagant love for the unlovely, his compassion for the wretched and the outcast, and the poor enabled him to endure the cross. He was hung on the cross no one wants to see. And it was there that he saved our lives by giving up his own. Jesus endured the shame of sin for you and me.

But there is more that needs to be seen. **The cross was also a place of suffering**. It was intended to be that way. An upright wooden post with a crossbeam near the upper part of the post, it was an instrument of torture- a cruel form of death reserved for rebels, robbers, and criminals of various kinds. So cruel and painful was crucifixion, that Roman law forbade its use on any Roman citizen.

The cross was a place of suffering, it was designed to be so. Death on a cross was a slow, agonizing, humiliating form of death...intended to torture its victims as much as to kill them. Nails were driven through the hands and feet and, more often than not, the one being crucified died of asphyxiation as the very weight of their own body crushed the lungs. It was a horrible way to die.

And so it was for Jesus. But he endured the suffering and he felt the pain. And the death he died was a death for you and for me. Did you hear that? **The death he died was a death for you and for me!**

And so the cross is seen as more than a place of shame and suffering, it is also a place of love.... and how we need that kind of love!

Love....not in abstract terms.

Love....not in sentimental songs and poems.

But Love...made real for everyone.... for all to see. For even though this is the cross we don't want to see, it is at the cross, that we see the very depth of God's love for us- for you and me. The cross is love made certain. The cross is love made real. The cross is love in action!

As Jesus hung there on the cross that fateful Friday, he experienced it all- the shame, the humiliation, the suffering and pain, the weight of our sins and our wrongdoings. And through it all, he also knew that by his wounds, we would be healed and made right before God. He knew that his death was for us.... he knew that his innocent suffering would free us from ours.

And that is why we must go to the cross. Because it is when we go to the cross, we discover there the incredible and wondrous love that God has for us. Amen.