**Sermon Luke 22:14- 23:56 – Good Friday 2022**

It is easy to recognise the villains on Good Friday isn’t it. It doesn’t take us too much effort to identify them. There is Judas the betrayer, Peter the denier, the self-righteous chief priests and scribes, the corrupt Roman governor, Pilate, are a few of them, and we can’t forget the crowd who yelled out Crucify Him. We find it easy to see these people’s sins, don’t we!

What is much harder for us is to take a good honest look at ourselves. What is hard for us is to recognise our own sinfulness. In the verses we sang during the gospel reading, we admitted that we were present with the villains, joining them as they betrayed, abandoned, and condemned. Let’s reflect on some of the villains of Good Friday and ask ourselves if there is a part of us that stands in solidarity with them.

Let’s begin with Judas. Judas was the treasurer for Jesus and the disciples. Judas loved money. Like many people, Judas looked to money for security and as the one thing he could rely on. Every day we are tempted to rely on money and things. When money becomes too important to us it messes up our priorities. In the extreme money ruins relationships as it becomes more important than people and more important than God. That is where Judas had ended up. He became a thief and eventually, he traded 30 silver coins for the life of his friend and Lord. Where do you stand in relation to money and in relation to Judas?

Next, let’s look at Peter. Peter had high principles and was determined to live up to them. He loved Jesus but he was also a little too self-assured. Certain that he would never betray Jesus. There are many people like Peter. People with strong principles, and good values. People who are determined to live by their principles, and often do, until the pressures of life trip them up. Peter was determined to stand by Jesus but then finds himself overcome with fear, compromising his deepest values, and denying his closest friend and Lord. Have you ever compromised your principles, have you ever stood with Peter? Peter has let his friend down and he has let himself down. Overcome with remorse and shame he goes outside and weeps bitterly.

Then there are the elders, the chief priests, and scribes? Those keepers of the tradition and protectors of the faith. On so many levels they were good people of faith. People we would look up to as great examples. They were trying to do the right thing. The problem is that there is a fine line between trying to do the right thing and becoming self-righteous. When you let pride get a hold of you can easily cross that line. You can begin to believe that you have all the right answers, that you are morally superior, and it is your duty to keep everyone else on the right path. Have you ever found yourself standing with the self-righteous?

Self-righteousness resulted in the elders judging those who did not fit in with their version of what was right, excluding those who didn’t measure up and in the case of Jesus seeking to get rid of him.

Then there is Pilate. Pilate declares Jesus is innocent three times but still hands him over to be crucified. Sometimes people are like that. They know the right thing to do but do the wrong thing anyway. Sometimes it is peer group pressure, sometimes it is selfishness and sometimes it is all about fear and protecting yourself. Have you ever stood there? Whatever the reason may be, when someone knows what is right but does the wrong thing, people get hurt. In fear, Pilate gave in to group pressure, looked after himself and Jesus died.

Then there are the crowds. The people who welcomed Jesus riding a donkey into Jerusalem less than a week earlier. The people who trusted their leaders when they told them Jesus deserved to die. It is amazing how easily people’s opinions are shaped by influencers, the media, public opinion and rumours. It is amazing how quickly a crowd can be whipped up. On Good Friday the crowd was influenced by their leaders, people they trusted, and with one voice they shouted, “Crucify him!” Their leaders used them to put pressure on Pilate and the court of public opinion won the day.

Later it dawned on them, as they stood around the cross watching an innocent man die. The crowd was no longer shouting, they were standing right there, silent. They realised that they had been fooled and manipulated and had innocent blood on their hands. It makes you wonder if we could be so easily led astray or if there are times we have been led astray and never even realised. When Jesus finally died the people gathered around the cross beat their breasts and went away. What had they done?

Right there at the cross stood the guilty watching an innocent man die. But that wasn’t the end of the story. As Jesus looked down from the cross and saw all the people who had put him there and heard so many of them still throwing insults at him, he spoke. He didn’t utter words of revenge or condemnation or anger. Instead, hanging there beaten and in pain he was to the very end, full of compassion. Full of compassion for all those who stood right there. Full of love for his enemies, Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34).

Forgiveness opened the door for all those standing right there at the foot of the cross. Forgiveness opened the door for us. It opened the possibility for all people to repent, turn back to God and be filled with God’s love. We no longer need to be bound by our sin, guilt, and shame. One of the two criminals hanging next to Jesus understood this as he spoke in faith to Jesus and said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:42-43 NIV). Those words were for all those who have repented and put their faith in Jesus. Those words are for us. Moments later Jesus breathed his last.

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