

**Homily**  
**Good Friday**  
**April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023**  
**Church of the Ascension, Ottawa**  
**The Reverend Victoria Scott**  
**Readings: ISAIAH 52:13-53:12; PSALM 22; HEBREWS 10:16-25 JOHN**  
**18:1-19:42**

The cross. An image that is so central in our Christian faith, particularly on this day we call Good Friday. This day, when we relive Jesus's crucifixion, his suffering and death on this Roman instrument of torture. When we relive the cold darkness of death.

As we entered into Holy Week on Palm Sunday I invited you consider the image of the cross, and how the shape of the cross might be found in our lives, in the living out of our faith. I suggested that the shape of the cross was found in Jesus's life and ministry as he walked a straight path to Calvary, refusing to flee from the cruelty and arrogance and domination that surrounded him. He walked that straight path with his arms spread wide. Gathering his followers close, saying stay with me. Reaching for those on the margins, the poor, the vulnerable.

Jesus refused to give in to the love of power that surrounded him, that turned the wheels of society around him. He refused to give in and stayed true to God's vision of love. He stayed true to the power found not in domination and power and control, but in love. As Richard Rohr says, he became the crucified so that we would stop crucifying. We are invited to walk that same straight path, a path made with love, with our arms spread wide as we reach out in love to those around us...

I often find myself overwhelmed with the "ands" of Holy Week. Our scripture and liturgies this week take us through a range of "ands" that are part of our human existence: intensely private moments and painfully public events. Adulation and abandonment. Celebration and conflict. We witness both honour and humiliation. We see integrity and infidelity. We make a journey that features both faith and doubt. We acknowledge once again the reality of religious and secular institutions: we are reminded that they are capable of both building up, and of tearing down.

We've just read what we call "The Passion" from John's Gospel. We usually mean suffering when we refer to Jesus's passion. There is an "and" in this, though. Jesus's crucifixion is both passionate suffering and passionate, grace-filled love. The cross is wood, stained with blood, sweat, tears, but behind it is the new fire of Resurrection, glowing, infusing it with God's passionate, boundless, endless, love. The cross is both the darkness of suffering and death, and the light of love.

In our Passion Gospel this morning, John brings us another profoundly important "and". It is an "and" of relationship. Jesus looks to Mary and the disciple he loved and says "Woman, here is your son", and "Here is your mother". Jesus reaches out and makes an "and" of mother and son. In this, is an invitation to all of us to make the "ands" that are in relationships. Just as God's love is more than we can ask or imagine, the invitation to see the "and" in relationship extends far and wide – beyond relationships of mother and son, of family. It is an invitation to look to all of humanity, seeing the "and" that links us all. It is an invitation to see the "and" between humanity and all of creation.

Some of you have heard me speak of Sam Wells' compelling argument that the purpose of the universe is *relationship*. He talks about the universe being made up of **essence** – that which is eternal – and **existence**, which will come to an end. Essence chose to be in relationship with existence. This was and is the whole point. Essence – God – chose, wanted, wants, to be in relationship with existence: **with us!** The Incarnation – Jesus – is essence coming to be in relationship with us. Jesus's earthly life and ministry shows us how to be in relationship with essence to infuse our existence with meaning. Jesus's death and Resurrection is essence choosing to remain in relationship with existence, and Jesus's Ascension is essence drawing existence into an eternal relationship, forever.

Essence *and* existence: a profound "and" that shapes and colours everything. God and us, and us and all of existence. This linking makes cross shapes everywhere. One beam connecting us in an "and" with God, and the crossbeam created as we embody that love in our living, in our actions. As we reach out to one another in love.

Today we remember that Jesus, made his way through the darkness of death in the name of love. We are invited to pause in that. We are invited to consider the things that “get in the way” of our walking the path that Jesus walked. That get in the way of our lives taking the shape of a cross: a straight path made with steps of love, our arms outstretched to join with those around us, to reach out and care for the vulnerable. What do we need to die to in order to walk the path of God’s love with and for each other? With and for the world? What do we need to do to live into the “and” of relationship with each other and with all of creation?

Last night, in the darkness of Gethsemane, today in the darkness of the shadow of the cross, we pause. We feel the weight of that darkness and death. This is an opportunity to acknowledge the suffering in our lives, in our world. To acknowledge grief and regret. To acknowledge betrayal. To acknowledge the shadowy parts of ourselves. To allow ourselves to feel loss. To feel absence. Today is an opportunity to acknowledge our dark emotions, and in that acknowledgement, there is room for our own dying. Our own dying to selfishness. Our own dying to the obstacles that get in the way of what connects us to God and to each other and our world.

Yet we know that through that darkness, through the cross, Jesus is waiting, stoking that Resurrection fire of love on the other side. Knowing this – seeing the darkness and light of the cross – makes “ands” for us that hold us on our journey. God’s love and grace made known in Jesus is an eternal linking of essence and existence. It’s an invitation, over and over, to let the cross shape our lives – word, and action – into loving relationship with God, with each other and with all of creation.

I invite you to take a lingering look at the wood of the cross today. Acknowledge the suffering that exists in our lives, in our world. Acknowledge the obstacles that inhibit fullest living. *AND*, at the same time, know that behind the wood of the cross, the new fire of the Resurrection lightens the darkness. With the Resurrection, comes a light with cross-shaped beams joining all the “ands” of our lives. May that light brighten all our days. May it shine in each of us, and may we let the cross shape our lives, creating “ands” of loving relationship, wherever we are, and wherever we go. In Jesus name. Amen.