

J.D. Ousley
Sermon—19Apr19
Good Friday
“Finished”

In the Name of God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. Amen.

As we meditate today upon the witness of Jesus Christ and his sacrifice, we are doing what many Episcopalians fail to do.

These Episcopalians much prefer to think about the happy events of the birth of Christ and his resurrection from the dead. We prefer to observe Christmas and Easter—we can do without Good Friday!

And not only are the birth of Christ and his resurrection nice to think about. It's easy to see how they apply to our own lives.

Practically speaking, as far as Christmas is concerned, we know that on our own, we struggle to make it in life. So we need to be guided by the Spirit of the infant Christ.

Practically speaking, as far as Easter is concerned, we know that we need the power of the Risen Christ if we are going to withstand the menacing forces of a fallen world.

But the value of *the death of Jesus* for our souls isn't so obvious. Sure, it's nice to hear that he “died for us.” But this is the sort of thought that can just sound good.

It's not at all obvious how Christ's death for us is going to make our lives better right now. For that matter, it's not at all obvious why we should go to church on Good Friday.

Well, let's begin by thinking about the cross. There are many interpretations of Christ's death. Theologians like to use the technical word, “atonement” for example.

And the simplest interpretation of that word may be the best understanding of Christ's death: just think of the atonement as meaning that Christ died *for us*.

Christ offered himself on the Cross so that we could come to God. Despite our sins, we can approach God because Jesus offered himself for us first. Think of “atonement” as three words, “at-one-ment.” Christ makes us “at one” with God.

This interpretation explains what is otherwise a disturbing event that took place while Jesus was hanging on the Cross. At one point during his suffering, he cried out in the depths of despair, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Now skeptics might seize upon this text and ask, “If Jesus was divine, how could he feel abandoned by God?”

That's a good question. But the answer again is simple: Jesus had to experience being forsaken because this was who he was—a human being. This was the feeling any man or woman would have, dying upon a cross.

If Jesus hadn't felt forsaken, it would have been because he was completely divine, not human at all. This was an ancient heresy called, “Docetism.”

This docetism said that Christ only appeared to suffer on the Cross. It's a heresy because if Jesus only appeared to suffer, he wouldn't have been human.

But he was human. And so he cried out in pain. He cries out from fully human pain.

There is one happy result, though, of this tragic event. Because Christ experienced human pain, he is able to bear the pain of *us* human beings.

Many people today have no trouble with the idea that Jesus was human. Yet it is also a heresy to say that Jesus was *only* human.

For if we say that, we make his death into just one more human death. And his death would be unable to do anything for us, today.

So we need to hold onto the traditional doctrine that Jesus was both human and divine. At the same time that he was born of a human mother, he was also “true God of true God,” as the Creed says.

But even that profound truth is not the whole message of Good Friday. For we also need to remember as well that Jesus the divine man died *for us*.

That is why we call this Friday, “Good.” Because Jesus died for me, I always have a reason to be thankful.

Things may be going badly in many parts of my life—yet if I remember the Cross, and I think of Christ’s sacrifice for me, I will realize that all is not lost.

There’s a permanent bright side to my existence: Jesus died for me, and because he died for me, I can come close to God.

I have the promise of life after death in “the company of heaven.” However stressful this world becomes, I have the hope of eternity.

So the Cross isn’t only about death. In fact, it’s really about life. It’s about our Spirit-filled existence with the God who raised Jesus from the dead. It’s about our life with the one who gave his life for us.

“It is finished,” Jesus said. Christ’s earthly life had ended.

But it is not finished for *us*. For us, on Calvary, at the Place of the Skull—for us, life begins. Amen