

MINISTRY
Good Friday, April 15, 2022
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On Good Friday, we rightfully focus on the crucifixion of Jesus. The corpus behind me, the cross, means many things to many people. It is a symbol of love and sacrifice, an instrument of torture and betrayal, a path to forgiveness and resurrection, and, for me, as I pondered this evening's message, a reminder of a loving ministry under excruciating circumstances.

Jesus' final hours begin with the Passover meal. He is enjoying his last supper with his beloved friends. Despite knowing the agony that awaits him, Jesus ministers to the apostles, establishing the Eucharist as the source and summit of our faith. Jesus continues to minister to his disciples telling them in the Mount of Olives that he has prayed for them, prays that they do not undergo the test.

Soon the temple guards appear with clubs and torches. In the chaotic scene, the servant of the high priest loses his ear. Jesus

ministers to him by performing his last known earthly healing... setting the servant's ear right.

Now arrested and before the Sanhedrin where a sham trial is conducted and Jesus convicted, he is roughly taken from the temple to Pilate. There, in the courtyard, is Peter as the cock crows the final time. Jesus looks to Peter, I'm sure with compassion... a ministry... as Peter recalls the messiah's prophecy of denial three times. How guilty and sorry Peter must have felt!

Now weakened from an agonizing flogging, Jesus is no longer able to bear the weight of the cross. Simon the Cyrenian is pressed into service and is forever etched into history. Jesus, I suspect, looked at Simon with gratefulness... a ministry.

Along the road to Golgotha, the daughters of Jerusalem weep for Jesus as they try to wipe his face and give him a drink. Jesus is more concerned for them rather than himself telling the women, "Do not weep for me but for yourselves."

Now nailed upon the cross when many others can only think of the pain and welcoming the freedom death would bring, our savior continues his ministry asking God to forgive his killers. “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” St. John tells us he looks down upon his mother and the disciple whom he loved and ministers to them... “behold your mother, behold your son.”

And... he extends the beauty of paradise to the repenting criminal.... “I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.” In his last act of earthly ministry, with his final breath, he takes upon the sins of the world, our sins, stepping into our wrongs so that we can be reconciled with the Almighty.

At least nine times in scripture, in his final hours, even after betrayal by his followers, kicked, beaten, teased, lashed and whipped, spit upon and mangled beyond recognition, Jesus **continued** to follow the father's will, to put others first. I don't know how he did it... physically and mentally... I know I couldn't do it... not even half of it. And so, on this Good Friday, I gaze upon the cross in simple, yet deep, grateful appreciation for the ministry that is Jesus the Christ. How about you? What do you see?