

The Cross Revealed – John 18:1-19:42

[OR Some Good News on Good Friday - Yup, That John Krasinski]

Pastor Caitlin Trussell with Augustana Lutheran Church on April 10, 2020

At the end of March, my son texted me a link to John Krasinski's first episode of "Some Good News."¹ I laughed through tears watching it. Few of us are immune to the good feels inspired by grit and compassion. Cravings for good news intensify as disappointments and heartbreaks flow. Because we label events as good or bad, it makes it tough when something like Good Friday comes along. Jesus is betrayed, denied, executed, and buried. None of that is good – except for maybe the tender care his body received for burial. Sometimes a closer look is needed. For instance, Mr. Krasinski highlighted hospital workers on his show – the selfless care given by custodians, pulmonologists, and everyone else, to people suffering all kinds of health crises included coronavirus. Also highlighted was a 15-year-old girl named Coco who was coming home after finishing the final round of chemo that healed her cancer. Of course, the flipside of these two good news stories is that coronavirus demands a lot from hospital workers and that there is a 15-year-old who had cancer. News is not immune to these complexities. Well, at least human news is not immune to them.

Good Friday is no exception. Jesus' death on the cross is chock-full of complexities. The cross reveals a lot all at once and the Gospel of John glories in the intricacy.²

The cross reveals a God who loves the world so deeply that becoming fragile and fleshy in Jesus was the go-to move. Jesus in the flesh is a mirror for us, reflecting our self-serving moves in the game we make out of the gift of life.³ Jesus calls out our schemes better than anyone. Jesus knew Judas would betray him and that Peter would deny him.⁴ There are reasons that the religious leaders were determined to have him killed.⁵ Neither friend nor foe are left unscathed by Jesus' truth-telling when it comes to the people we hurt or the way we hurt ourselves.

¹ John Krasinski. SGN: Some Good News, Episode 1. March 29, 2020.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F5pgG1M_h_U

² "Glory" in the Gospel of John refers to Jesus' death on the cross rather than glory as triumphal victory as we would typically understand it.

³ John 1:1-14

⁴ John 13:21-26 and 37-38

⁵ John 2:13-16

His truth-telling frees us from the prisons we build for ourselves with illusions of perfection and invincibility. Not pain free but it IS good news.

The cross reveals a God who would rather die than raise a hand in violence against those who plot and execute his death sentence. When soldiers came for Jesus, he told Peter to put his sword away and healed the man injured by it.⁶ Jesus' message of God's love for the world was so audacious that he was killed for it. He wasn't caught off guard. His ministry of sharing God's unconditional love could not go unnoticed. Self-sacrifice is something we understand when we experience it on our own behalf or hear a good news story about it. Jesus' self-sacrifice reveals God's grace that defies our understanding.

The cross reveals God suffering with us when we suffer. In Christian scripture, especially in the Gospel of John, the power of God is manifested in Jesus. Not responding in violence, Jesus suffered – which means that God knows suffering. We are not alone in our suffering whether it's self-inflicted or comes out of nowhere. God's light in Jesus shines in the darkness of suffering, shame, and fear, meeting us in the very place we think is furthest away from God.

The cross reveals relationships made new through suffering. Jesus spoke with his mother and friend before taking his last breath:

“When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, here is your son.’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother.’”⁷

Jesus used his last breaths to reorient his mother and the disciple's relationship toward each other. Everything leading to his crucifixion – healing the sick, exorcising demons, welcoming sinners, feeding the hungry, challenging corruption, exposing greed – everything Jesus did that hung him on the cross is continuous with the conversation he's having with his mother and his friend. It's the last thing he does before he announces, “It is finished.”⁸ He connects his friend and his mother to each other even as he's reconnecting the world with God through the covenant of the cross.

⁶ John 18:10-11

⁷ John 19:26

⁸ John 19:30

Good Friday reminds us that God is in the covenant business. The cross as covenant cradles the truth about us in the hands of the one who opens his arms to all as he is crucified. God does the heavy lifting of cross beams and connection to set us free into God and toward each other. Yet there's this tendency to act as if Jesus is going to return from the nastiness of the cross in an incredibly bad mood and hurt the very world God professes to love. We reduce God to a capricious, malevolent taskmaster who requires appeasement even as we're told earlier in the Gospel of John that God did not send Jesus to condemn the world.⁹

My friends, we reduce God to the worst of ourselves – the worst of ourselves that we keep hidden and the worst of ourselves in the 24/7 news cycle.

But God is not diverted by our lack of will and misguided distortions. The eternal God entered time to reveal self-sacrificial, unconditional love and free us into God today and for all time. Today is Friday and we can call it Good. Today, we remember that God's covenant with the world was finished on a cross and sealed by a tomb. Stay tuned for more good news...

...and receive this blessing...

May the God of cross and tomb guide you to obedience in love.

May Christ shine light into your darkness with the breadth of his grace, and

May the Holy Spirit deepen your + faith, hope, and love,
through all that is to come. Amen.

⁹ John 3:17