



Church of St John the Evangelist, Elora  
April 7 2023 - Good Friday  
Canon Paul Walker

As we continue the journey through Holy Week and we follow in the footsteps of Christ, today, the church has become a tomb.

Stripped of all adornments, flowers, candles, and sacred vessels; void of all linens and colour, the church invites us to descend with Christ through his sufferings and passion, and into his death.

It is the only day of the year when the presence lamp, the candle above the altar, is extinguished. It is the only day of the year that the aumbry, the cupboard in the wall of the sanctuary which holds the sacrament of consecrated bread and wine, is empty with the door left open. Christ has been abandoned and it feels and looks like we are too. Christ is condemned, shamed, ridiculed, stripped of all honour and dignity and left to die naked on a cross.

It is the ultimate act of public humiliation, human degradation, and horrific suffering.

It is not a place we willingly go with any kind of enthusiasm. It is what policies and insurance and

medication and other substances are intended to protect us from. But those things only go so far. We all still face the laying down of a loved one, and the laying down of ourselves to the grave.

It is the awkward conversations we have with loved ones or children or parents about “when I die”, or “where I will be buried”. It is the reluctance, and indeed fear, to encounter the event of death because its circumstances are so unknown, and its results are so final.

It is what Bob and Jane Cooper’s family deal with this week as they learned that Bob’s nephew, Matt, was killed in a car accident. It is what Barb and Graham Dunsmore are dealing with as they learned last night that their 43 year old son, Philip, died unexpectedly in his sleep in London earlier this week.

The church invites us on an annual basis to encounter this reality in its raw starkness, and gives us the resources to do it with hope.

Good Friday marks the inevitable arc of the incarnation and the incredible extension of that arc. Christ, the Son, empties himself of all power to leave the intimate fellowship and bond of love with God the Father, and enters, powerless and

vulnerable, into our human frail existence on earth. In that very human existence of suffering on the cross Jesus cries out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.”

It is the cry of the cancer patient, the refugee, or the prisoner. It is the cry of the addict, the abused partner, the single mother who has just lost her job, or the parent whose child has just died.

It is the cry of any one who is bullied, ridiculed, thrown out of the social circle, suffered discrimination or been the victim of human trafficking. It is any and all of us who, for whatever reasons for despair, echo the same cry. Whether it be on a systemic level - institutional corruption, government abuse of power, climate anxiety, racial injustices, genocide of indigenous peoples - or on a personal level - economic insecurity, loss of relationship, abuse, loss of physical health. All of these are good reasons that cause us to think we have been completely abandoned and we cannot face another day. It is finished, and so are we.

But as we hear the meditations on the cross we are invited to sit in the overwhelming despair of the world and in the abandonment of this day. We begin the great decent into hell with Christ. And

with Christ on the journey you know what will happen. We will begin to hear from a distant horizon well beyond this liturgy an unimagined whisper. It is a gentle soft chorus that has been rehearsed and sung over and over again precisely for this moment. As we listen, we recognize the text. Yes, yes of course, you have heard it before. It is a proclamation of the good news heralded to the shepherds by the angels in Judea and now whispered in a sealed tomb in Jerusalem: God with us. It is what Isaiah spoke about: The people who walked in darkness and in the shadow of death have seen a great light.

So as Jesus descends to the dead, into the depth of hell, he drags that heavenly host and all of creation with him.

Because one of the great things that the passion of Christ powerfully illustrates is that God has gone to the deepest reaches of suffering and allowed himself to receive it, be absorbed it, and be completely consumed by it. Christ has gone willingly to the place where all of us go reluctantly, and there, in a sealed tomb he shines a light.

It is for that reason, even in the tomb of a church, that we are able in all audacity to call this Friday “Good.”