

April 6, 2012  
Questions for Lent and Easter

[Location – Green Haven Mausoleum Chapel]

*The Good Friday Question*  
John 19:28-30

**Opening Words:** This is Good Friday. Some people call it Black Friday. Perhaps that is a better name. For it is on this day we remember that Jesus died on the cross. You can admit it. The death of Christ is an uncomfortable topic. Who wants to worship a dead savior? It has become our custom to come to this place on Good Friday to drill home the fact that Jesus was dead. There is no nice way to say this. You are surrounded by the dead. For three days, Jesus was one of them. This is the question for this evening: How uncomfortable are you with the death of Jesus? The Gospel lesson for this evening tells us Jesus was dead. May God give you ears to hear this evening's Gospel lesson, John 19:28-30.

---

**John 19:28-30** 28 Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." 29 A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. 30 When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

---

The Mackenzie River is Canada's largest river system. It runs through vast sections of her barren Northwest Territory, and empties into the Arctic Circle. It was named after a Canadian explorer, Sir Alexander Mackenzie. He lived near the end of the eighteenth century, and longed to lead an expedition across Canada to the Pacific Ocean. His incredible journey was completed in 1793, 11 years before Lewis and Clark. That was his second attempt. His first attempt ended in failure in 1789. The first attempt failed because the group traveled on the Mackenzie River. They hoped it would empty into the Pacific Ocean. Instead, it turned north. History tells us the original group was devastated. In his diary, Mackenzie himself called the river that now carries his name, The River of Disappointment.

Has anyone here this evening ever experienced disappointment? Have you ever been disappointed in your spouse? Have you have been disappointed in your children? Have you ever been disappointed in your parents? Have you ever been disappointed in your friends? Has anyone here ever been disappointed in the government? Have you ever been disappointed in your church? Have your ever been disappointed in yourself? You can admit it. From time to time we all do it. You turn your critical eyes inward and you don't like what you see. You are not alone. Some of the greatest people in the history of the world have been disappointed with themselves. Consider these names with me:

Did you know Alexander the Great conquered Persia, but broke down and wept in disappointment because his troops were too exhausted to push on to India?

Did you know Hugo Grotius, the father of modern international law, knew disappointment? Near the end, he said, *"I have accomplished nothing worthwhile in my life."*

Did you know John Quincy Adams, sixth President of the U.S., knew disappointment? In his diary he wrote, *"My life has been spent in vain and idle aspirations, and in ceaseless rejected prayers. I hope I did something beneficial for my species."*

Did you know Robert Louis Stevenson wrote words that continue to delight and enrich our lives, and yet he knew disappointment? He wrote these words for his own headstone, *"Here lies one who meant well, who tried a little, and failed much."*

Did you know Cecil Rhodes, who opened up Africa and established an empire, knew disappointment? His last words were, "So little done, so much to do."

Do I have to continue? You are not the first person and ours is not the first generation to experience disappointment. It is one of those things that link one generation to the next. It is because of disappointment we can appreciate this evening's scripture lesson.

At the very heart of this evening's scripture lesson is disappointment. It hadn't been that long. The week began with great promise. The crowds came out on Sunday morning and welcomed Jesus to the Golden City for the Passover. Their world was hungry for change, and Jesus was just the man. He was a young charismatic leader, who seemed to have all the answers for their society's ills. Everyone was excited and was filled with anticipation. They were ready for political change. There was only one problem. Jesus didn't come for to liberate them from foreign domination; Jesus came to liberate them from their sins. He was a spiritual Messiah. The Master tried to tell them, but they won't listen. He tried to tell them that entire week. He tried to tell them when he rode on the donkey. He tried to tell them when he cleansed the temple. He tried to tell them when he cursed the fig tree. He tried to tell them when he taught about the Kingdom of God. He tried to tell them when he washed the disciple's feet and celebrated the last Seder with the disciples. Jesus kept trying to communicate about this spiritual liberation, but he might as well have been speaking to Sunday's donkey. They didn't get it. And before things really got going, Jesus was arrested.

We find Jesus this evening at the first of his two trials. Those who are questioning him are the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council. Jesus had challenged their authority and tried to change everything. If you haven't noticed, people don't like change. So his enemies try to get rid of Jesus so things will remain the same. They have charged him with blasphemy, disrespecting God. So they ask him point blank, *"Are you the Son of God?"* Jesus responds, in so many words, "Yes!" Jesus has made his enemies' case. They want to kill him, but they don't have the authority. It is for this reason they take Jesus to the Roman governor, Pilate. He knows Jesus is innocent, but he wants to keep the crowd happy. He sentences Jesus to death by a Roman form of execution, the cross. It is ironic. The same crowd that accepted Jesus on Sunday rejects Jesus on Friday. The week that started with great anticipation, ends in great disappointment.

Jesus, the son of God, the Messiah, the perfect one, is dead by 3:00 in the afternoon. His death was not pretty; it was hard to watch. His followers are overwhelmed with grief!

The next time you see a cross, remember these three things. Maybe someday we will look at them in detail.

**1. The cross reminds us of the ugliness of sin!**

**2. The cross reminds that the eternal is more important than the temporary!**

**3. The cross reminds us of God's great commitment to us!**

If you think you can remember one of those three things, say, **"Amen!"**

In 1858, the Illinois legislature--using an obscure statute--sent Stephen A. Douglas to the U.S. Senate instead of Abraham Lincoln, although Lincoln had won the popular vote. When a sympathetic friend asked Lincoln how he felt, he said, *"Like the boy who stubbed his toe: I am too big to cry and too badly hurt to laugh."*

Maybe that is our story this evening? For 364 days a year, we celebrate the resurrected Jesus! This is the one day of the year we wrestle with the divine truth. JESUS IS DEAD! We know Easter is coming, but today is Good Friday. On that day he died! They placed his dead body in the tomb. His generation was disappointed, and our generation is uncomfortable. No one wants to worship a dead Savior. Maybe those are the words of our generation? "We are too big to cry and too badly hurt to laugh!"

Let us pray...