

*37Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.*

We have made it into entertainment: Good Friday - a guided tour of the crucifixion. Like turning off the lights in a cave for a moment for an instant we sense the darkness. Then just as the panic starts creeping, all is light again.

Good Friday - a brief excursion.

We have been on the tour so many times we are beginning to know all the words, and their meanings.

“Father forgive them,” you all could fill in the rest.. “for they know not what they do.”

“Behold your son, behold your mother.”

“Today you will be with me in paradise.”

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.”

“I thirst.”

“It is finished.”

“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”

Good Friday has become a ritual like washing the dirt from our hands before a meal, like sinning and asking forgiveness. If we could see all the creepy crawlies all over those hands we would wash with a new intensity. If all the pain caused by our sins was visible to us, we'd confess with new intensity.

But washing, confessing, Good Friday are now mostly a habit - no surprises in these for me.

The weight of the cross - the nailing - the dividing of the garments - the mocking - the darkness - the cry of being God forsaken - the sponge with sour wine - the temple curtain being torn in two from top to bottom - the centurion watching, witnessing, “Truly this man was God's Son.” - we search for new ways to show these, redo it all. We want to feel it all again, so that we can feel Easter with new joy.

But today I ask you to put it all aside but for one verse. Mark 15:37. “Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.” One verse and another story.

The very first day of Jesus' public ministry - the first time he was before the crowd, in a synagogue in Capernaum on the Sabbath.

"Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit and he cried out, 'What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.' But Jesus rebuked him saying, 'Be silent and come out of him!' And the unclean spirit convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice came out of him."

Good and evil, God and Satan are at war here. "Have you come to destroy us?" Evil knows. There can be no compromise. One will win, the other will lose.

That day in the synagogue Jesus won.

But now at the cross, good and evil, life and death, God and Satan, are locked in struggle. All evil has come to cast out all good - evil performing an exorcism on God.

Now the loud cry comes from Jesus' mouth, now the spirit that is cast out is the human and Holy Spirit in Jesus.

"Have you come to destroy us, Jesus? We cast you out, here, on the cross - God out of our world."

The spirit of God was gone, not only from Jesus, now a corpse, but from the temple: curtain torn, God no longer present there.

For a moment in time the battle was over. The Spirit of God cast out.

Today we remember that moment. And shudder.

Can evil win? Can God be defeated? Can sin and death possess God's good creation? When the sun went down to begin the day of rest, there was no answer to these questions but the lifeless body of Jesus, the echo of his horrible cry, the temple, God's dwelling place on earth abandoned. And one more thing, the promise of Jesus: "On the third day I will be raised."

Sometimes you and I live on that Sabbath, when there is no sign from God. Events of our lives cry out that God's Spirit has been cast out. We are crushed, abandoned, forsaken. Evil flourishes, awards its practitioners with wealth, and power, and laughter. And good is ridiculed, mocked, crucified. Death is mighty, spreading, feasting. Life is so fragile, like a flower wilted by a day's dry wind. And all we have is a whisper from God - a word of promise to cling to: "On the third day I will be raised."

When the Sabbath had ended, very early in the morning..... you know that story best of all - the story of the return of the Spirit of God, turning the lifeless flesh of Jesus into a new and glorious body. But not keeping that Spirit to himself - now breathing the Spirit of God into all who believe. Satan and sin and evil and death are not victors, but are all being cast out of God's creation by you, by you who are now the new temple of God's Holy Spirit.

Today, Good Friday, there is only darkness and death, but not despair.

For we remember Jesus' word of promise.