

Today was the day Jesus died. We're used to seeing Jesus heal the sick, address large crowds with his breathtaking message of love. We watch him chastise the Pharisees and turn over the tables in the temple. We prefer him riding triumphantly into Jerusalem-- or reigning from on high as Christ the King. Strong Jesus. Kind Jesus. Confident Jesus.

But today is the day Jesus died. We see something unfamiliar—anguish, uncertainty, vulnerability. He faced his death by execution stripped of his clothes, betrayed and deserted by those closest to him, falsely accused, ridiculed. He was wounded, and not just in body.

It's hard to think of Jesus that way.

Today you are the brave ones—the ones who personally know that there is pain as well as joy in life. So now it is you who are the ones willing to walk with Jesus and share his pain.

It probably wouldn't surprise you to know that here in the United States only a small fraction of Christians attend a Good Friday service. Compare the number of people here today to the number we will welcome on Easter morning.

Easter is happier-- Easter morning is fancy clothes, egg hunts, alleluia's, joy. We're good at those things. We are Americans!

We're much less comfortable with anguish.

I'm told that in South and Central America Good Friday services attract nearly as many Christians as Easter. I don't know why. But no matter where a person lives, perhaps only those who have

experienced powerlessness, pain and great sacrifice can understand in a visceral way what it feels like to be vulnerable. To understand sacrifice, and celebrate it.

A great bishop I once knew said, “Nothing in the world ever changes without someone sacrificing something.”

So where do we find ourselves in Jesus’ story?

Priests – *even me*—are forever telling people: Jesus’ story is our story. Is his story only about *what he did for us*, or can we – ***should we***-- find a place where this story is our story on some level?

So I ask you: “When in *your* life have you been crucified?”

Crucified, crucifixion—they’re loaded words. I don’t think I’ve ever been *crucified*. The words speak to me of capital punishment and cruel torture. Those things do still happen in our world today—but not to me personally. So let’s change the words of the question:

Where do we feel like we’re being killed? What part of us feels like it’s dying? Well, that hits home a bit more.

Here’s another one for us—“Where are we killing others?” Where are we shouting out for vengeance, for death? And remember—physical death is only one type of death. Who are we keeping from having a full life?

And suddenly -- we’re a part of the story.

This is the day that Jesus died for us. Jesus pain is writ large and unguarded on his face.

Let's be honest, we completely drop our mask with very few people

It's tough to be vulnerable.

But all of our deepest relationships are built on love and trust. With those we are closest to-- we share our joy-- but also our wounds, our distress. In some way, they shoulder some of our pain.

Those **we** cherish are those people who have shared with us not only their happy face, but their scared face, their conflicted face, their anguished face. They let us see the truth in them. They let us help bear their burden.

We're in relationship with Jesus--- he daily hears our innermost thoughts, understands our concerns, stays with us in *our* pain and walks with us through our losses.

And that's why we're here. To hear *his* confession of distress in the garden of Gethsemane. To witness *his* pain. To walk with him and help bear his burden. These are the things we do for someone we love.

It's called ministry of presence.

Jesus walks our road with us, and now--we walk this road with him.

Because that's what love does. Because he died for us, and this is our story. Amen.