

Good Friday

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[0:00] One of the films that was released last year in 2025 had some Oscar buzz to begin with. It ended up not getting nominated, but the film was called Nuremberg.

and it tells the story of the Allies' attempt to bring the remaining leaders from the Nazi regime to justice. And that includes Hitler's second-in-command, Hermann Göring.

And when you're watching the film, you are reminded of just what disarray Europe was in, in the aftermath of World War II.

And as you watch the opening scene, you see families and elderly people walking away from this bombed-out village. And we know that in the years that followed, Germany was marked by all kinds of physical and economic devastation.

And countries like France and Germany were crippled by debt and by food rationing. And the churches in those countries, whether they were Catholic or Protestant, they were in a state of shock.

[1:06] They were grappling with the idea that this could have happened, these atrocities could have happened in countries that they thought were Christian.

It was a season of complete darkness and absolute hopelessness. And no journalist, no newspaper writer at that time would have known about, let alone even written about, a small Christian renewal movement that had been happening on the fringe of the church in France especially, but some other European countries during this time.

But there was a small number of theologians. Many of them were Jesuits or Dominicans. And they had been questioning the staleness and the lifelessness of the church in the early part of the 20th century and some of its mindless political alignments.

And they had advocated for a fresh return to the original sources of the church, to Scripture and to the church fathers, to bring renewal to the church's worship and to its theology, to the way that it engaged with culture.

And it became known as the *nouvelle théologie*, the new theology, which is ironic because it was actually a return to the old theology.

[2:37] And they were dismissed from their academic post. They were sanctioned and silenced by the church authorities. And yet their ideas spread and lay Christians began to gather in homes, especially around France.

And they began to discuss these new ideas and to begin to seek this deeper experience of Christ. They were reading the Christian mystics along with Scripture and to discuss how Christian faith should be impacting society for good.

But no one knew about this. It was the very smallest of seeds. It was on the fringes during the very darkest years in Europe as the state became more and more authoritarian and everything looked hopeless.

This evening we listened as John's gospel, chapter 18 and 19, was read.

And there is something about just listening to it, uninterrupted, in that extended way that reminds us of just how dark and hopeless everything was.

[3:55] Jesus had been arrested and mocked and tortured. And even Pilate's last-ditch efforts to try to save an innocent man to no avail.

Nothing worked. And so we heard John 19. Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him.

And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. They came up to him saying, Hail, King of the Jews, and struck him with their hands. And when the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried, Crucify him, crucify him. So they took Jesus and he went out, bearing his own cross to the place called the place of the skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha.

And there they crucified him and with him two others, one on either side and Jesus between them. I think it's important that we let settle into our minds the reality of Good Friday and what Jesus went through.

[5:20] And it is important to remember because the church's celebration of Easter does not begin on Easter morning.

It begins with Holy Week. It started last week on Palm Sunday with Jesus' entrance to the city of Jerusalem. It continued last night on Maundy Thursday with Jesus' last supper with his disciples and the stripping of the table.

It continues tonight on Good Friday with the crucifixion of Jesus. It leads into the silence of Holy Saturday tomorrow with Jesus in the tomb.

And nothing. We won't gather during Holy Saturday. There's nothing but silence. There's nothing but darkness and waiting. And it's important to remember this because the story that we are collectively living into tonight and this week, here in Holy Week, is not simply a story about historical events that occurred 2,000 years ago.

It is our story too. What happens in Holy Week is a pattern for how life works.

[6:43] Just as the story of Adam with his temptation and his fall has been our human story, so the story of Jesus, the second Adam, becomes our new human story.

And in the story of Jesus, at that most climatic moment of his life in the events of Holy Week, the fundamental pattern is that resurrection is always preceded by suffering and crucifixion.

There are no exceptions. Good Friday always comes before Easter. And it's easy to forget this.

It is easy to think that life should be about a succession of happy moments and success and things going well, and we are constantly caught by surprise when it's not.

And in our surprise, it is easy to sometimes grow angry or resentful when things don't go as we planned, when unexpected suffering comes into our lives or disappointment, or when we're hurt by others in ways that are just objectively unfair and unjust.

[8:09] Last week, I was talking to a friend in a key relationship in his life had gotten really hard. And no matter what he does with this relationship, he seems unable to fix it.

And I seem unable to fix this. This relationship that had been so important and suddenly was not working anymore.

And he said to me, I didn't see this coming. And he said, I did not expect at this point in my life for this to be happening to me.

Good Friday is not just for Jesus. It is for all of us. We will all live in seasons of Good Friday.

And the question is, how do I respond? How might I walk with Jesus on Good Friday? How might I join him?

[9:33] The church fathers said that we walk with Jesus by seeking to respond as he did. John Chrysostom was a church father writing in the late 300s.

And in his commentary on tonight's passage from John's gospel, he writes this about the events of Good Friday. He says, let us not only read about these things, but let us keep them in our minds.

The crown of thorns, the robe, the reed, the blows, the strikes on the cheek, the spitting. Keeping such images in our minds helps us to diminish our own anger in response to injustice.

Even if we are mocked or suffer unjustly, let us continually say a servant is not greater than his master. This is why Christ endured all these things, so that we might walk in his footsteps and endure mistreatments.

He said, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. Let us imitate these things, for nothing pleases God more than loving our enemies and doing good to those who insult us.

[10:51] I don't know what your Good Friday might be, or perhaps it's not a Good Friday moment right now, but we will all go through seasons of

Good Friday.

And not just as individuals. Churches go through seasons of Good Friday. Church of the Advent will not be immune from seasons of Good Friday any more than any other church.

Church of the Advent will not be immune from God. Good Friday is part of our story. Jesus' story is our story. Resurrection is preceded by crucifixion.

Renewal and new life is preceded by suffering. We are walking this week through the most fundamental story of not just Jesus' life, but our life in Jesus.

And so how will we respond? In the middle of the 20th century, as Europe grew more dark and as it seemed the church was lost and powerless and without hope, these small Christians in France and other places drew together to enter more deeply into scripture and to prayer and to the mystics and to talk about social renewal.

[12:27] And in the darkness of World War II and the devastation that followed, no one was paying attention. But then something surprising happened.

In the vacuum and in the disorientation following the war, people in Germany and France and Italy, they were looking for new people to lead their country.

They were looking for fresh ideas. They wanted to be led in a new direction and to the surprise of everyone, they turned to Christians who had been gathering in homes over the past decade, who had been part of or influenced by this renewal movement and seeking to apply Christian insights to society in fresh ways.

These new leaders formed a new political platform that became known as Christian democracy. Christian Democrats argued for a synthesis of various political ideas that did not neatly fit into the categories of left or right.

They were informed by theological ideas like the dignity of all human beings made in the image of God. They emphasized the morality of politics and policies that supported things like a social market economy and cooperation between capital and labor and strong support for families and marriage and having children.

[14:02] And Christian Democrats were overwhelmingly elected and led European countries for the next 15 or 20 years after World War II. And during that time they brought Europe out of destruction and insolvency and food rationing and they helped rebuild society.

They created universal healthcare, universal education, pensions for the elderly. During those years marriage rates and fertility rates boomed, divorce rates fell, and families became more stable.

Weekly church attendance grew and even the numbers of those entering ministry went up substantially. Now, we only have to look at Europe today to see that those things don't last forever. But renewal movements never last forever on their own. They have to be attended to and nurtured and updated in light of new realities and circumstances.

But that reality should not blind us to the fact that in the bleakness of 1945 no one would have predicted the renewal that was to come.

[15:20] And no one would have guessed that a small Christian renewal movement could lead to the renewal of Europe. Augustine famously said that we never know where we are in history.

It's very hard to know actually the moment that we're in. But we can know this.

We don't have to be afraid of Good Friday. It was part of Jesus' story. It is part of our story.

Whatever our Good Friday is, let's walk with Jesus in it.

Let's respond to the darkness the way that Jesus responded to the darkness. Let's plant seeds of renewal in our own lives, in our life together as a church in this neighborhood, in this city.

And we do it because we know that in God's way and in God's timing, Easter is coming. Amen.

Amen. Thank you.