

GOOD FRIDAY

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- [0 : 0 0] My name is James, I'm one of the pastors here, and it is good to be with you here today on Good Friday at St. Paul's. Over the last few weeks of isolation, I've seen my kids miss out on spending time with their friends at school.
- And it's made me think about the influence that their friends have on them. So my oldest son, Isaac, he comes home saying different words that I've never heard before.
- His most recent one is, us. And I don't really understand it. I think it means good or great, but I'm still trying to figure that one out.
- It was a couple of months ago, he came home asking for a Rubik's Cube. So we got him a Rubik's Cube, and now I'm still trying to figure it out so I can teach Isaac how to do the Rubik's Cube.
- But the things that Isaac's friends love, Isaac begins to love. The way that they behave and speak, he begins to behave and speak.
- [1 : 0 6] And this is the same for all of us. The story of our lives is marked by people that have shaped us and had influence on us.
- I remember asking a friend back in the early 2000s what music I should buy. You know, Christmas was coming up. What albums should I get? And one of the bands, I still listen to them today.
- They continue to influence the music that I listen to. Who are the people that have influenced you most? Who are the people that have shaped your life the most?
- You might think of people that have had a negative impact upon you as well as positive. Some people may have tried to influence you away from following God, or some people might be influencing you to grow as a disciple following Jesus.
- The people that we love and are loved by shape our lives, and they mark the story of our lives. Today is Good Friday.
- [2 : 1 0] It might not feel particularly good at the moment. Usually it can feel a little more special in this country because we have public holidays. And our country stops for this weekend.
- But at the moment, with the whole nation on lockdown, it doesn't feel particularly good at the moment. But today, as we step into the story of Easter, we see Jesus, even as he is heading to the cross, shaping people's lives.
- And we see the good that Jesus brings us because of his death and resurrection. Today, as we step into this story of Easter, it is a good time for us to consider how much of our lives has been influenced and shaped by Jesus.
- How much have we allowed the story of Easter, Jesus' death and resurrection, be our story? Of death to ourself and life because of Jesus.
- So as we look at God's word today, let me pray for us. Dear Heavenly Father, I thank you indeed for this time to stop and reflect and reconsider all that you did for us in Jesus' death on the cross all those years ago.

- [3 : 32] Heavenly Father, it has shaped human history and it continues to shape our lives today. Be with us as we look at your word, that we would allow your story of Jesus' death and resurrection to be our story and to be shaped by it, Lord.
- Amen. We are in the book of Luke. And as was read for us, Jesus has been found guilty by Pilate.
- And he is on his way to be crucified. And as he is on his way, he is confronted by a group of women waiting for him.
- Have a look at verse 27 of chapter 23 with me. A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wept for him.
- Jesus turned and said to them, daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed.
- [4 : 40] Even as Jesus is being led to his death, he is trying to warn people of the coming judgment. Things will be so bad, it would be better if you didn't have children.
- But for Jesus to say this, something drastic must be about to happen. Because it was considered a curse to not have children. So it is like Jesus saying that it would be better to be cursed than blessed because of the coming judgment upon Israel.
- Jesus had been warning people all throughout his ministry. If you don't turn and follow God, he won't allow you to continue forever. Judgment is coming.
- It's a sobering warning. Jesus is saying, I will die soon, but your pain will extend for a long time. Wait for yourselves.
- Because if God allows his righteous son to suffer crucifixion, what terrible fate must await the unrighteous Jerusalem and those who cry out but crucify Jesus.
- [5 : 56] Even as Jesus is being led away, his concern is not for himself, but he is trying to influence and to shape people with his last words to heed the coming danger.
- Jesus doesn't get anything out of this. He doesn't benefit from this. He is still about to die. His concern has been for the people. I think many people have underestimated the impact of the coronavirus.
- I think we all have done this initially, but people continue to not heed the warnings. I read about a pastor of a church in Florida in the United States over the last week who continued to encourage his church to meet, to pack people together, to continue to shake hands and continue to hug because, as he said, they were not pansies.
- He didn't heed the warnings. He didn't heed the warnings. And he was arrested because he was breaking social distancing laws. How much worse could it have been if someone had been sick and they didn't heed the warnings because of the virus?
- Jesus calls on people to heed his warnings, but many people didn't. Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD.
- [7 : 20] It was God's judgment on a rebellious nation and this city. Now, we don't know if these women heeded Jesus' warnings, but the warning still stands for us today.
- Will we heed Jesus' warning of coming destruction and judgment? And will we follow the Lord? Jesus continues to seek to shape people's lives, even as he is crucified.
- Have a look at chapter 23, verse 33. When they came to the place called the skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals, one on his right, the other on his left.
- Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. It's not exactly clear who Jesus is praying for, but it's most appropriately understood that Jesus is praying for all of those who are responsible for his death.

The Jewish court, the Jewish leaders, for Pilate, for the crowd, but also for all sinners who are responsible for the need for a savior to come.

[8 : 29] That includes us. Jesus and his self-giving love and forgiveness, his cry of forgiveness, is contrasted by the mocking cries of those around him.

Have a look at verse 35. The rulers even sneered at him. They said, he saved others. Let him save himself if he is the Messiah, the chosen one.

The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine, vinegar, and said, if you are the king of the Jews, save yourself. In verse 39, one of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him.

Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us. Even when Jesus is mocked and beaten and hung on a cross to die, he still has concern for those who are killing him.

He says that they do not know what they are doing. They knew that they were killing someone. They knew that they were doing that. But they don't know what God is doing.

[9 : 31] They don't know that God is working at the death of his son to see their forgiveness. Because forgiveness comes to those who don't deserve it. Luke's use of the verbs here paints a picture of people who do not deserve forgiveness.

The rulers sneered. The soldiers mocked. The criminal hurled insults. These are descriptions of horrible people acting in disgusting ways.

And yet Jesus' prayer is also for us. Father, forgive them for they don't know what they have done. They didn't know that they were killing the son of God.

And yet here and now, we know the cost of our sin. It meant that Jesus had to die. And yet Jesus still prays for us who know the cost of our sin.

But when we are shaped by the generous and selfless forgiveness of Jesus, our story changes too. Over the last week, I read a story about a mother from the US.

[10 : 41] Her name is Mary Johnson. And her son, Loramium, was killed in a gang-related incident. He was only a young man and he was killed.

A 16-year-old confessed to the crime and he was sentenced to jail. Mary Johnson, at the time, said that she forgave him.

She said, the word says, the word the Bible says, in order to be forgiven, you must forgive. So I said, okay, I have to tell him. But I wanted him locked up and caged.

So I said, and so she stayed in emotional turmoil, wrestling with this desire to forgive, but this desire for her son's murderer to be caged.

But God worked on her heart over those 10 years. He slowly shaped Mary throughout this time to forgive completely. She eventually met with her son's killer again and said to him, look, I told you in court that I forgave you.

[11 : 50] But today, from the bottom of my heart, I want you to know that I forgive you. Mary said, he was like, ma'am, how can you do that?

She said, because of who is in me. Mary knew God's love and forgiveness and it shaped her story. It took 10 years.

It took a lot of pain and wrestling with God's forgiveness of her so she could forgive, but she was able to hold out that same love and forgiveness even to her own son's murderer.

Jesus is still seeking to shape our lives, to shape our tomorrow to know his forgiveness. Are we people who are quick to forgive?

Are we people wrestling with what it means to forgive others because we have been forgiven so much ourselves? Holding grudges is not how God is shaping us to be.

[12 : 57] He is shaping us to be people to know his forgiveness and to hold it out to others so when they say, how can you forgive me? We can say, because of who is in me, because of who has forgiven me.

Jesus has been seeking to shape people's lives even as he's headed to the cross, even as he's hanging on the cross and we see him continue to do that with the criminal on the other side and the centurion even without speaking to them.

After one of the criminals mocked him, the criminal on the other side spoke to him in verse 40 and said, don't you fear God since you are under the same sentence.

We are punished justly for we are getting what our deeds deserve, but this man has done nothing wrong. The other criminal has been shaped by seeing Jesus' character.

He has seen him, he's likely heard his trial or heard of his trial, likely seen Pilate's declaration of Jesus' innocence and he understands who he is and who Jesus is.

[14 : 14] Jesus is innocent, but this criminal knows how sinful he is and what he deserves. Jesus' reputation and character influences this criminal to come humbly to Jesus.

Verse 42, he said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. Remember me. That's all he asks.

He doesn't shout like the other criminal, save yourself and us. He says, remember me. And Jesus says, verse 43, truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.

What a wonderful promise for Jesus to give to this criminal. He will have all his sin, his terrible decisions that led to him being crucified, which only he knows too well.

He will have all of that forgiven and he will be in paradise. Can you imagine this man's joy and elation, even though dying, to hear these words from Jesus' lips?

[15 : 23] This is who we want to be as a church. We want to be authentic like this criminal. We want to be a church who is cultivating a heart of humility, seeing our pride weakened through the journey of our life, knowing who we are just like the criminal knew who he was and knowing who Jesus is and how dependent we are on him.

How much better is it to know how bad our situation is than to pretend that everything is fine? The story of Easter is that it shapes how we view ourselves.

Jesus' death on the cross allows us to all be that criminal, to both know our low position before Jesus, but also to cry out, remember me, to know me.

And Jesus' promise for us all is that we can be with him in paradise. As Jesus was about to die, he called out with a loud voice, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

When he had said this, he breathed his last. Even as Jesus is dying, he is shaping the lives of people around him. Verse 47, the centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, surely this was a righteous man.

[16 : 53] The centurion, the soldier responsible for ensuring that all of these criminals died, who had likely seen many, many deaths, he sees what happens to Jesus and it causes him to praise God.

His death influences the centurion to see that Jesus was innocent, to declare that he was righteous and to praise God. This is a Roman who is not just praising a God, he is not praising a God of the pantheon or all of the gods, he is praising the Jewish God, the Christian God that Jesus came to reveal.

What a stunning moment that even when Jesus breathes his last, he is shaping an enemy to bring praise to God. When we see Jesus, the Son of God, dying on the cross for us, it leads us to praise God.

Oh God, how marvelous it is that you have saved me. How good and lovely and kind are you that your Son would die for me.

Jesus sought to shape and influence all the people that he came into contact with to see that he was from the Father to follow him with all of their heart.

[18 : 19] And here, in the lead up to his death, Jesus has been calling people to heed his warning of judgment, to be forgiven even though we don't deserve it.

He causes people to understand their sin and see that Jesus is the only one who can save. And he leads people to praise God.

Jesus, in his death and resurrection from the cross, it shapes our lives, it shapes our yesterday and it shapes our tomorrow.

the story of Easter, the story of Jesus, as it continues to be read and told, it shapes our lives and this is why we continue to come back to it every year.

It is why we continue to celebrate it in a season of crisis or when everything around us seems normal. I am a product of those who I have allowed to influence me, those who I have allowed to speak into my life to change my story and my direction.

[19 : 25] Who are you putting into your life to influence you, to shape you? Here at St. Paul's we take our youth away for a camp every year at the start of the year.

One of my favorite parts of that camp is seeing the relationship that builds between older brothers and younger brothers and older sisters and younger sisters. I remember Ko, one of our young adults, he loves reading the Bible and he loves memorizing it.

And I remember seeing him sit with one of our younger brothers, our younger guys, reading the Bible early in the morning. Not only are they being shaped by God's word, but there is an older brother shaping a younger brother, teaching him to love godly disciplines.

You might be finding that you're not spending time with any people because of social distancing and isolation, but that doesn't mean we're not being influenced and shaped. In this time, we can be shaped by what we watch on TV, those people in our house, but we also have an opportunity to build new disciplines, to be saturated with God's word in the Bible, so that it can not just shape what we read, but our whole lives.

Jesus enters into the story of our lives and he shapes us. There is a coming judgment, but his death brings forgiveness, and it shapes our lives to forgive others.

[21 : 04] His righteousness reveals our dependence, and his death brings us to praise God for all he has done. God's to forgive us.

And we want to enter the story of my life and change it and to shape it. As Mary Johnson, the mother of the son who was killed, shows, this is the journey of our lives.

That Jesus and his death and resurrection from the cross continues to shape our lives. God's maybe you are at the start of this journey.

Maybe today, just for the first time, you are realizing that you need Jesus' help. If that is you, let me encourage you to do what the criminal on the cross does, to cry out to Jesus for help.

Because he promises that he will come to him in paradise, and he promises that for all who believe in him, we will be with him for eternity. If this is you at the start of your journey, Debbie is going to share some details in a minute in how you can contact us.

[22 : 12] We would love to be in contact with you, even if it is only over the phone. We would love to be praying for you to see you continually shaped on this journey of following Jesus.

Or maybe you have been on this journey for many years. Maybe you have been following Jesus for many years. Let me encourage you this Easter weekend, as we stay inside, to find some time to spend with Jesus.

To read over the Easter account in Luke 23 and 24, and ask Jesus, what part of my life am I not letting you into?

Jesus, what parts of my life am I tightly holding on to you? Jesus, how do you need to be shaping my life so that I can forgive people, so that I can know fully who I am, so I can understand who I am and how dependent upon you I am, so that I can praise God for all that he is doing in my life and in the world today.

Please pray with me. Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for your goodness to us. In that first Easter, where your son died on the cross, an innocent man, God and man dying on the cross in our place.

[23 : 44] Heavenly Father, as we have seen, this shapes our lives. Lord, thank you. Thank you so much that you do not leave us to our own devices, but that you sent Jesus to shape us so that we could have forgiveness.

Not only that, that we would be people like Jesus, who love you, who seek to forgive others. Lord, we ask that as the world and life seems to be on hold, our trust and our love, for you would not be on hold.

Father, please continue to grow us and shape us, to know you and to love you and to be praising you more and more each day.

This we ask in your son's name. Amen.