“My God, My God .....”
John 18:1 - 19:42
April 10, 2009 - Good Friday

So we hear again the story of the suffering and death of Jesus. It is at the heart of our faith and we know the story well. But do we really know the story? How is it that such cruelty - such suffering and even death could ever be a part of the good new, let alone at the center of what we claim and even celebrate? Often we hear the story and brush it off with the simple platitude, ‘it was the will and plan of God’. Yet - such a God would hardly seem to be a God of love and compassion. Such a God would not be one that I would have a lot of interest in knowing or serving.

As the words still ring in your ears this evening, I would invite you to consider the story from a perspective that perhaps you have not considered.

Tonight we hear the story of events that took place in a moment of history. They are events that are set in a world that existed in that particular time and place. It is my belief that those events played out as they did, not because they were the will of God but because they were a part of the world of those days. Crucifixion, flogging and the kind of torture that Jesus experienced were a part of a human culture that we would call barbaric today. Yet, it was into that time and place that Jesus came. He came by the will of God and as a part of the plan of God. But God’s plan was not to have Jesus tortured but to redeem creation.

As you reflect on these familiar events, what we see over and over again is humanity deeply touched by the power of sin. Judas, a friend and disciple of Jesus, turns on Him. Why - some suggest greed - others talk about his misunderstanding the plan of God and his desire to make things work out the way Judas wants them to work out. We have religious leaders out to protect their positions of power - leaders that devise a plan to keep radical elements that are threatening to disrupt the church as they know it. You have government officials that are not willing to stand up for what they believe to be right and give in to the destructive will of people who have the power to make life rough. So a political leader simply says, ‘what’s the life of this ‘nobody’ compared to my comfort?’ There is so much of that kind of human sentiment in the story - Peter denies knowing Jesus just because it could be painful and dangerous to do anything else. Soldiers are just doing their job - and after you have been through many, many crucifixions .... Why not do what you need to do so that it is not such an objectionable duty. Roll some dice, get what you can out of the job - get it done and get home to the wife and kids. All very human stuff. But not the will of God ..... The will of God always has been and always will be to redeem the Creation that He loves.

And so Jesus is nailed to a cross - the means of execution used by several nations during that time in history - a means of capital punishment that the Romans perfected and

used a lot. It was barbaric, perhaps even beyond our imagination. To read the stories of times when hundreds - or even thousands of crosses lined the roadways and the details of the death of those who suffered that cruel death makes me wonder about the inhumanity of man caught in the grip of a sinful world. But it was not the will or the plan of God. The plan of God was to redeem and save that world.

Perhaps the most poignant moment in the entire story comes as Jesus hangs from the cross. Having now witness and directly felt the worst that mankind could endure as a result of the iron grip of sin on humanity, His face lifts toward the heavens and He cries out, "My God, My God, why ..... Why have you forsaken me?"

I have long felt, as I believe many have, that these words bring us to the most devastating climax of the story - perhaps an even darker climax that the death of Jesus itself. We imagine Jesus feeling totally abandoned by God .... Too often we have felt that same feeling and questioned whether God is good or evil - whether God is vindictive, angry and punishing and abandons us when the going gets rough. Or worse yet, whether God even exists. In the midst of incredibly difficult experiences in life, I have heard many express these sentiments. ..... But, tonight as you ponder the events of the passion of Christ, I would ask you to consider these words in a new light. Tonight I would ask you to hear them as words of trust shouted over the pain inflicted by sin. In the midst of the worst that sin could inflict Jesus express His most intimate and pleading words of trust. "My God ..... My God ....." Jesus takes the opening words of a Psalm that was known well to the faithful people of God and makes it His own. "My God, my God ...." This is the God who clothed and care for Adam and Eve even after they sinned against Him. This is the God who chose to protect Cain after he had killed his brother and instruct Noah to build an ark when a flood was eminent. This was the God that had lead them out of slavery to a promised land. And though the people were rebellious and sinful, God always provided. This was the God that the Psalmist knew and cried out to in those intimate words, "My God .... my God"..... 'why, in the midst of all that I suffer in this sin filled world do I feel so alone - so abandoned?' But the Psalmist went on in those moments of reflection to say: "He did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him." My God ..... my God does not abandon His people. Though we go through the darkest moments that sin can create, God does not abandon Jesus or us. And finally Jesus is able to trust all that He is ..... His very life and death into God's hands as He says, "Into You hand I commit my spirit.' And He breathed His last.

Tonight we remember the brokenness of a world entrapped by sin and see in Jesus that call to trust God in those times when we experience the worst of it. Tonight we remember that God is at work even in the darkest moments of life and will shower His grace on us even though we may have to wait for a time to see how that grace will appear. Tonight we begin our waiting with Jesus until the third day to see how the story turns out. As we wait, the darkness often covers us and we may cry out to our God. "My God ..... my God ....."

AMEN