

Would you imagine with me what it must be like for Jesus on the original Good Friday?

Only a handful days ago, Israelites everywhere were celebrating and preparing for a feast as they enter the holiday of Passover – people from all over have gathered back at their ancestral home in Jerusalem, to spend days enjoying each other's company. They are remembering and celebrating the merciful act of God, who has passed over the houses of Israelites, but who also was God of death to the Egyptians that very evening.

As Jesus entered the city, people were ecstatic about him, thinking that Jesus, who have performed many miracles that can be only accredited as an act of God – especially the recent miracle of resurrecting Lazarus, is finally here to free them once again to the modern bondage of slavery to the Romans. They have found their “Moses” to lead them to be once again a free people of their own nation. Israelites have given him the respect and honor by giving him a triumphal entrance, equivalent to a red-carpet treatment, by placing cloaks and palm branches in order that his feet do not touch the dirt of the earth that is filthy and dirty. What they are missing is that Jesus chose to fulfill the prophesy of the old, to be on earth where the people are, and to show them the heart of the matter, not simply the result.

As the week passes by, things quickly change. After much accolades only a handful days ago, there are no crowds tonight as Jesus is sitting at the table with his disciples, having an intimate meal. He has been telling everyone what is going to take place next. He tried to explain that he will die on people's behalf. No one understood, so he withdrew with his closest twelve, hoping that they would understand. But every word felt like it fell on deaf ears. Not even his

disciples that he has been leading and molding seemed to get it. Therefore, Jesus spends his last moments demonstrating his love for his followers by washing their feet, sharing the good news of the help coming through the Holy Spirit, and giving hope by promising his return to turn sorrow and mourning into joy. No one knows at the final dinner table what is about to take place except two people in the room: Jesus and Judas. When Judas reveals his traitorous plan, people cowardly came to arrest Jesus in the middle of the night, away from public view. Rather than reacting to the moment, Jesus had a larger picture in mind. He probably saw faces of his chosen people that he loves, including yours and mine, and graciously gave himself up.

What is amazing about the Passion of Jesus is that his grace for the people starts even before it starts. It has always been there. Jesus embodies grace to all throughout his ministry on earth. That same grace is extended to us today as we shelter within our own homes and it is grace that binds us together in Spirit.

A Presbyterian pastor, Rev. Robert Beringer, shares of a personal story of A.J. Cronin – who was a doctor turned a novelist – that catches the wonder of gift of grace in his book, *Turning Points*.

The Adams family at the close of the Second World War decided to open their home to a little refugee boy with the outlandish name of Paul Piotrostanalzi. The Adams had two daughters and a son named Sammy. Sammy and Paul became inseparable friends, but little Paul was a difficult child, and often disobeyed Mr. and Mrs. Adams. One day, little Paul went swimming in some contaminated water. He became very ill with a high fever, and the doctor suggested he sleep in an attic bedroom. But little Sammy

missed his friend Paul so much that one night he crept up the attic stairs and into bed with Paul. Paul's hot breath fell on Sammy's neck all night. In the morning, Sammy, never a strong child, became deathly ill. Paul recovered his health, but Sammy died within three days. It was a terrible tragedy for the Adams family.

A year later Dr. Cronin decided to pay a call on the Adams family. But as he pulled into their driveway, he was amazed and then angry as he saw Paul, the refugee boy, working in the garden with Mr. Adams. He got out of his car and angrily approached Mr. Adams. "What's this Paul Pio.... Whatever his name is, doing here after what he did to your family?" Mr. Adams looked at the doctor and then said quietly, "Dr. Cronin, you won't have any more trouble with Paul's name. You see, he's Paul Adams now. We've adopted him."¹

As we prepare to listen to the Passion of Christ according to John tonight, let us listen for the grace that is woven throughout the story. Let us listen for the love that is being poured out for us in these dark chapters of Christ dying on the cross for us. Although we may never completely comprehend the monumental grace that has been lavished upon us, let us accept his grace extended to us in our hearts. And let us hope in faith, waiting expectantly that we, too, will be resurrected on our Easter day. Amen.

¹ Beringer, Robert. *Turning Points : Sermons For Lent And Easter*. Lima, Ohio: CSS, 1995. Pg 45.