



Service of Tenebrae

TEXT
Luke 22:39–71;
23:1–56

April 19, 2019 — Good Friday — Sermon by Rev. Zach Walker

Something we face on this day is the stark reality of the way the world, or sin, or opposition or brokenness — or whatever we might wish to call it — reacts to the person of Christ. We face the way it reacts to a love it does not understand. The only response it has is to reject and kill it.

Jesus came to show what it means to embrace others in love and grace, and his radical embrace was met with catastrophic rejection. The world simply had too much to lose — too much power, too much privilege, too much of the status quo — that in the end, the person of Jesus was too threatening. And so the world betrays Christ, denies Christ, taunts and accuses Christ, and ultimately sentences, crucifies, kills and buries Christ.

And the temptation, at least on my part, is to turn an accusing finger at the world, blaming and shaming the world for the ways it runs roughshod over such love. It is tempting to believe that the systems of the world are to blame, or that the problem is with others.

But when we read the story of this day, while we can say it

is the world that rejects Christ, it is ultimately individuals who carried out — who were the agents of — that rejection.

It was a follower who betrayed him.

It was a friend who denied him.

It was those who were supposed to protect him who taunted him.

It was religious authorities who accused him.

It was those with political power who sentenced him.

It was a crowd who condemned him.

And so, the crucifixion, death and burial of Jesus, while it might be the world's brokenness and darkness that prompted these actions, it was the willingness of individuals that executed them — executed *him*.

On this night, and throughout tomorrow, we do well to contemplate our own individual actions that are complicit in pointing toward the death of Jesus on a daily basis. When we are honest with ourselves, we see that betrayal, denial, taunting, accusing — these are not just the actions of others, but they are our own actions. They are our actions when we are lured by self-interest, or

fear, or lack of understanding, or the desire to feel powerful.

Perhaps it is uncomfortable to see these things in ourselves. But to deny their presence is to deny our humanity, and to deny the salvific meaning of Easter and rob it of the joyful *Alleluias* of Sunday morning.

Without reflecting on our role in the brokenness of the world on this night, we risk fully knowing the joy Sunday will bring. Without contemplating what brings about the events of this night, we fail to see the ways in which all that brought Jesus to the tomb was our doing, and all that lifted Jesus out of the tomb was God's doing.

For the good news, of course, is that just as the world had a response to the proclamations of Jesus, God had a response to the world — God *has* a response to the world — God has a response for us. And while the world's response to Christ was death, God's response is something else entirely.

As the world outside darkens, as this room darkens, we cannot help but know that Sunday is coming — Sunday, when God in Christ responds to what the world has done — what individuals have brought

about — and that response is an emphatic no. In response to our rejection, God's still chooses life and love.

The ways of the world and of brokenness lead to death and burial; the ways of God and wholeness lead to life and resurrection.

We might find ourselves in our day-to-day lives caught up in the schemes of betrayal, denial, taunting and accusing that ultimately only lead to one place. Yet God's response is as faithful and gracious as only God can be. God's love will not be undone by our brokenness.

But we do not get to God's response in this story without spending time in honest reflection at our role in what causes it — our role not in pointing to and blaming the world's faults, but contemplating the potential for darkness in our own hearts. We don't get to celebrate Sunday without grieving on Friday first.

Tonight we see the terrible consequences of what a hard heart can bring about. On this night, we see the reckless damage we are capable of and admit that when we act out of fear or narcissistic certainty, or with the clouded thinking of a mob, or any number of ways that disregard the love and wisdom God desires for our lives — when we do so, it only leads to death on a cross and burial. It is, without a doubt, such actions that extinguish light and hope in a world desperately in need of God's life-giving response.

On this night, if we choose to see it, we come face-to-face with the cruel consequences of a world that is not different from us, but a world that is us. But it is also a world whose hope rests solely on God and God's love, just as we ourselves do.

On this night, we have rejected the one who came to save. Our hope rests in what God will say next.

This sermon was delivered at Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, KS 66208.

The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church's Web site: www.villagepres.org/sermons.