

I've been thinking back this week on the first Good Friday worship service I ever experienced. I was a college student and had the gift of being able to attend the noon service at my home church in Madison. It was quiet, contemplative, and each of the seven pastors gave a meditation on a different portion of the gospel text. I loved hearing all their perspectives and the ancient hymns woven throughout the liturgy. I felt so peaceful and at ease in my pew, comfortably in the middle of the church, my head bowing in prayer and rising again in focus on the Passion story and traditions.

After about the fourth pastor gave their meditation, I realized some folks around me getting up and leaving, which I thought was odd and had never seen in a service at this church before. And then I realized my legs were getting a little restless, and out of curiosity, I checked the time on my phone. Little did I realize, nearly two hours had passed in worship! Two hours, and I hardly noticed it. I felt my way through all the feelings of the Passion story and accompanying prayers and liturgy and was so immersed in the experience I could hardly tell that time had passed. And after feeling through all those feelings, no wonder I was starting to get tired too.

When I went to that worship service, I did not realize it was a very traditional three-hour long *tenabrae* service, covering the time Jesus hung on the cross, from about noon to three PM, as the tradition suggests. And yet most of that time was so spiritually filled and driven by faith that time felt completely different to me. Time both flew by and stood still in equal measure. God has an interesting way of working through time and through journeys, rather than within our own expectations.

One of the main reflections I've heard from lots of folks during this time of pandemic is that time feels completely differently to them. Each day, with its constant stream of new developments on the news, new policies and procedures, new cases of Covid-19 confirmed or tested, election practices rapidly changing, new ways to teach your kids and connect your families, figuring out work in new rhythms in our homes (oftentimes working more

now than you ever did before), and all the host of things we deal with on a daily basis can make the days seem extremely long. Our days involve so many things to do, so many things we can do, and for many so many things we cannot do that are longed for. All of these experiences are exhausting. And yet it's hard to believe that it's been less than a month since our world has completely changed. Less than a month since we announced Mt. Zion's building closing and event postponement. Less than a month since Wisconsin issued its "safer at home" order. Less than a month since the schools closed indefinitely. Less than a month since we've had to completely rehaul our lives and adapt to an entirely new and unprecedented and different way of being. Long days, short weeks, time is completely turned around these days.

And so time feels differently in this Holy Week, in these three days of Christ's Passion. All the events that led up to these days in Christ's life were foretold by prophets for thousands of years before Jesus was even alive. The Psalm we heard today was written hundreds of years before Christ, and the way the events unfolded leading up to his crucifixion is as they're described in the old psalm. Jesus even leans on the words of this psalm, which foretold the way his death was going to happen, when he cries out to God, asking why God has forsaken him.

And in the hours Jesus suffered, from being betrayed by his disciple Judas, to being questioned by Pilate and his own people shouting for him to be crucified, time must have felt different. The time in which his body was abused and broken, when Jesus was dying for the sake of all people in such a painful and vulnerable way is unique too. This event, of Jesus' death, was predicted for so long yet took such a comparatively short amount of time. And this event meant the saving of the whole world, all of humanity, every person in existence, for thousands of years afterwards. The death and new life of God's chosen Son, Jesus Christ, the savior of the world, takes place for such a short time, and yet changed the entire world for thousands of years to come.

How often one event in our lives changes them forever. How one single day, one period of a few hours, a couple weeks or months, completely makes our lives different than they were before. The birth of a new child, the final moment of a loved one's death, the journey of medical treatments, transitioning to a new chapter of life, graduating, moving, all these things change our lives so intensely. And while some of them do lead to joyous things, gratitude, and life change eventually, there is always a loss of something. A loss of the life before children, the

And we need time to grieve these changes, whether good or bad. We don't always focus on the negativity if we know positivity is around the corner. And often we associate a grieving process with something negative. But it certainly does not have to be.

Certainly, sorrow is normal and rooted in the love we feel for who and what we have lost. We may be angry in certain new ways or try to bargain in other areas of our lives because we don't know what else to do with these feelings of loss. Especially in a country where our physical needs are so often and able to be met, we are not always good at feeling loss, or like something is missing from our lives. This journey of grief is normal and healthy and God is certainly with you in all of it. It may not always be easy to identify where God is in the midst of our depths, even Jesus understood this sensation. But in this dying and rising of Jesus Christ, the death in which we remember, gather, and grieve today, we are assured that nothing will ever, ever separate us from God's love. Nothing will ever come between the deep and life-saving love that God has for us, all of God's people. No grief, no pain, no death so painful will ever stop God from loving us and being very present in our lives.

This moment in time, the hours of Jesus' life that we remember today, continues to save us and give us grace and love in every breath we take, every single moment of our lives. No matter how we grieve, no matter how time feels or passes or surprises us, we can be sure of God's reign over

any power, even the power of death. As we grieve today and beyond, as we remember Jesus' sacrificial death, as we think of who and what we have lost in recent times, know that it's okay to feel sorrow. It's okay to feel forsaken. It's okay to feel a bit alone and disoriented and overwhelmed. What better time and in what better presence do we have to feel through these very human feelings than in the time of Jesus' death. We know the promises of hope and new life are always there, and yet feeling our way through the grieving and recognizing the complicated realities of it is a crucial step to getting to the place of new life. Jesus' death happened so the resurrection could happen too. And we can take the space and time we need, no matter how different it feels now, to grieve our losses and remember the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks to you, O God, for the Passion of Your Son Jesus. Amen.