



# SAINT LUKE'S

HOW DID WE END UP HERE?

GOOD FRIDAY

ISAIAH 52:13-53:12

PSALM 22

HEBREWS 10:16-25

JOHN 18:1-19:42

A SERMON BY THE REV. POSEY KRAKOWSKY

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How did I end up here?

This is a familiar question.

It's one we've all asked ourselves at some time in our lives, probably many times.

We ask it in those moments when we are trying to get some distance from what is right in front of our faces. When everything seems to slow down, and we step outside of ourselves.

It's almost as if we are watching a movie of our own lives, because we just *can't believe* what we are seeing.

When a huge natural disaster like Katrina or Hurricane Sandy happens, it feels like that.

The situations are so extreme that people just can't make sense of what they were experiencing.

For New Yorkers, 9/11 was like that.

We just couldn't believe what we were seeing.

I think the events of the Passion of Jesus must have felt like that.

Hearing John's gospel today, I can imagine the same look of confusion and denial on almost *everyone* of the faces in this passage.

They just can't believe what they are seeing.

As we listen to the story unfold, we can see the shock taking hold of each participant, one after the other. (PAUSE)

This *can't* be happening. This *isn't* how things are supposed to go. (PAUSE)

How did I end up **here**?

And then the inevitable next question:

Who can I blame?

Let's start with Judas and the soldiers. In John's gospel, Judas doesn't kiss

Jesus to identify him, in fact, he doesn't even say a single word. All he does is lead the officials to the garden. After that, he stays in the background. "How did it come to this?" he's thinking. "How did I get here? What have I done?"

And what about the soldiers? Clearly reluctant to complete their assignment – they don't arrest Jesus until *he* has identified *himself twice*, and then, only after Simon Peter attacks the high priest's slave with a sword.

"What are we doing here?" they are asking, "Why are we doing this?"

After Peter strikes, they snap to attention, *now* there's someone to blame. But Jesus deflects their attention away from Peter, bringing it back onto himself. Only *then* do they arrest him.

And what about Peter? Peter *follows* Jesus to the house of the high priest. It's a very dangerous thing to do – after all, he's just cut off someone's ear! So once he's there he tries to keep a low profile, standing outside the gate, then blending in with the crowd around the fire.

"Just a few days ago," he must be thinking, "Jesus rode into town triumphantly. The people greeted us with cheers!"

"How did it come to this?"

It's no wonder he denies Jesus 3 times – I certainly would have if I were in his shoes. And yet, he doesn't leave. It's as if he were compelled by horrified fascination.

This *can't* be happening.

How did I end up here?

Next we see Jesus taken to Pilate's headquarters. The Roman soldiers had a

garrison right there on the temple grounds. They kept a very strict watch over the Judeans, and the temple priests had to come to the garrison to get their sacred garments before sacrifices. This was a clear sign of subservience to the Roman Empire. Since there had troubles with the Judeans before, the Romans wanted to be sure that there was *no question* who was in charge.

And yet, *Pilate* is clearly confused. Why was *he* having to deal with an internal Judean argument? Couldn't they settle it on their own? The last thing the Romans needed was a new insurrection – especially when the city was packed with visitors for the Passover celebrations. *Pilate's* own position was shaky – his patron in Roman, Sejanus, had just recently been killed. So, *Pilate had to be sure* things didn't get out of hand.

Let's look at the trial itself – It sounds like something in a Franz Kafka story. The Judeans are outside, refusing to cross the threshold that would render them ritually unclean. (hand gestures)

Jesus is inside.

So *Pilate* is shuffling back and forth like a messenger. Think about that, *Pilate*, the most senior Roman official in the province, is shuffling back and forth like a messenger. He goes in and out 4 times. *That's* not normal. It would have been beneath his dignity to dance attendance between the priests of a conquered nation and a prisoner. In John's telling of the story, everything is very, very upside down.

And finally we have the three Marys – standing at the foot of the cross, bearing witness to Jesus' agony, hour after hour. How excruciating to stand and watch a beloved son, nephew, friend, die. A crucifixion wasn't just execution, it was execution done intentionally in a slow, painful, humiliating way. Can't you imagine them feeling like the entire world was shifting

beneath their feet? Gravity wasn't working anymore. How could this be happening?

How did I end up here? What does it all mean?

I think we have all had that experience recently – that sense of surreal disbelief as we watch our lives unfold. Things we thought we knew were certain and understood have been upended. Old evils we thought were being held at bay have resurfaced with a vengeance. Things we never imagined we would see happen have occurred. I don't know about you, but right now I often feel like asking the question Pilate asks: *What is truth?* And let me just say, in asking that, I am NOT endorsing alternative facts.

Instead I am asking us to consider looking beyond the parts that we play in a world that too often glorifies death, a world that can revel in destruction and create entire industries out of vilifying others. When we fall into those patterns, we do so in order to reassure ourselves that we are larger and more important than we really believe we are. We do so because we secretly despise our own smallness. We do so to satisfy the ravening wolf of our egos. And when we do – we fall into despair as we dig our own graves by constantly living in ways that are out of sync with God's desires for us.

This gospel passage shows us those forces – those human forces of destruction – hard at work, thwarting and inhibiting God's love. The love that is the center of all existence. Those forces are so powerful that they brought about the death of Jesus – so what then does the story tell us about the redemption of the world?

John's gospel answers that question.

There's only one person in this story who isn't confused or perplexed – only

one person who walks clearly ahead into the future. And it isn't a future any of us would wish for. It's a future that includes leaving everyone he loves. It's a future that includes an agonizing death and humiliation.

That person is Jesus.

This is not the gospel where Jesus asks to have this cup taken away.

This is not the gospel where Jesus asks why God has forsaken him.

Listening to John's words, I found myself wondering how Jesus could be so certain, so sure, so ready to take on the agony of his immanent death?

How could he find it right? How could it be fair?

John's gospel answers that question by recognizing that we *all* ask it.

We see it asked over and over again in this story – not overtly, not out loud, but in the subtext. And we hear it answered over and over again by Jesus – not overtly, not out loud, but by his actions. John's Jesus is both fully human and fully divine. John's Christology shows us the fullness of God's plan for all of creation. He is Jesus – the incarnate one who lived as one of us and shared our experience. And he is also Christ – the one who was and is and evermore shall be – the creator, the blueprint, the plan of all being. We are part of that sacred plan and sacred incarnation. As is all of creation.

ALL WILL BE WELL.

Jesus' manner in John's gospel speaks this message loud and clear.

ALL WILL BE WELL.

Jesus isn't panicking here – he isn't running away.

ALL WILL BE WELL.

Jesus isn't stepping back and distancing himself from what he is experiencing – he's living it full on.

ALL WILL BE WELL.

Most of all, Jesus isn't blaming anyone for it. He knows that suffering is part of our existence. But that it isn't the final truth of our existence.

ALL WILL BE WELL.

Jesus knows that, to God, every moment of every life is sacred.

"For this I was born," he says, "and for this I came into the world, TO TESTIFY TO THE TRUTH."

So beloved are we that God chose to answer our despair.

So beloved are we, that God chose to share our experience.

So beloved are we, that God chose to become one of us.

Every life, every moment, every breath is impermanent. It's over before we even know it has occurred.

Every life, every moment, every breath is sacred.

Nothing goes unnoticed by God.

Nothing is dismissed.

Nothing is wasted.

How did we end up here? We ended up here because God is faithful. God chose to love us for exactly who we are in every moment of every day. God chose to love us for every experience - whether our lifespan is 80 years, or 8 hours, or 8 minutes.

I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord;  
he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live;  
and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.

Amen.

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