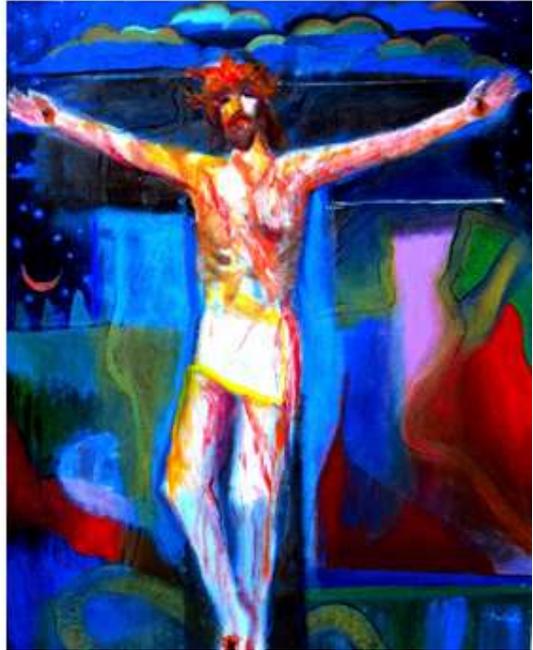

“GOOD” FRIDAY ?

West Epping Uniting Church
Good Friday - 30th March 2018

Rev John Barr



Good Friday...what's 'good' about Good Friday?"

A good man dies. He dies a most terrible, cruel, barbaric death. And we want to say it's "good"?

It seems to me that calling Good Friday 'good' is a contradiction in terms. Indeed, this day appears to be far from 'good' as the powers 'that be' single out, torture and crucify a perfectly good man.

Jesus of Nazareth came in peace. Jesus of Nazareth healed the sick. He touched people who were hurting and he restored those who were broken hearted. He reached out to people who had made a mess of their lives and he embraced those who were considered to be 'nobodies' in this world, offering dignity and purpose to everyone he met.

Here Jesus spoke of love. Jesus practiced love. Jesus embodied love.

And he preached that great Sermon on the Mount:

"blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.....blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.....blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.....blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.....blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God....."

Such beautiful words.....such an incredible, compelling teacher. Such a compassionate, caring healer. Such a devoted, impassioned advocate!

But, today, we mourn his death. We grieve his suffering and we weep over his wounds as we gather around that horrible cross, stunned and speechless over what the authorities have done in crucifying this most innocent of persons.

(2)

Yet, this brutal, ugly crucifixion stands at the heart of Christian belief. The cross is everywhere – it's here in the sanctuary of this church, it's worn in the form of a pendant around our necks and it's embedded in the symbols of the church.

For, what appears to be a most tragic, horrible event actually shapes our identity. It draws us together. It brings us to this place, here at 9 o'clock on a Friday morning when others are sleeping-in or are out and about enjoying a public holiday.

And it does so because in all of this we learn a great deal about the God who reaches out to us in love.

For Good Friday tells us God is actually there among the horrible things that happen. The events of Good Friday tell us that, not even in the worst of events, not even in the most brutal, tragic happenings, can we ever be separated from the love of God.

God is there in the tough stuff, God is there among the rubble, God is there when we muck things up. God is there when life's ambitions fail. God is there when we are overlooked or cast aside. God is there when relationships break down. God is there when families fight or when the people we love are at each other.

Friends, God is there when the doctor tells us our condition is terminal. God is there when we lose a loved one. God is there when death comes knocking at our door. God is there in the darkest of all hours.

For you see, Good Friday, apart from being a most terrible tragedy, actually tells us a lot about God. Good Friday tells us that God is not distant. God is not remote. God is not detached. God is not disengaged. God is not absent. Indeed, our disappointments, our failures, our conflicts, our suffering and our deaths all matter to God.

And this means life's many 'stuff-ups', life's frequent failures, life's constant mishaps, indeed, life's menacing fears, are not foreign to God.

The messiness that is life, the contradictions that we live each day, the 'dead-ends' that we are constantly confronted with, are not unknown to God.

And, in all this messiness, in all this failure, in all these 'stuff-ups' and in all this bewildering confusion, God is ever present.

Friends, Good Friday is indeed 'good' because God actually knows what it's like to be down and out. Good Friday is 'good' because God knows what it's like to be singled out and bullied.

Good Friday is 'good' because God understands what it means to be victimized, ill-treated and tormented. Good Friday is 'good' because God is aware of the rotten times when addiction, depression or a feeling of not being able to cope kick-in.

Good Friday is 'good' because God is touched, indeed God is wounded by everything that sucks us up, pulls us down and makes us less than what we are meant to be.

(3)

So, my friends, take some solace in this day. Take some comfort in the presence of this brutal, ugly crucifixion. For, in all of this, we are assured God is present. In all of this, we can be certain God is there.

But there is more. For, what we see and what we experience today is not the 'be-all' or the 'end-all' of things.

There is a future as the God, who doesn't run away from the hard stuff, takes on the darkness. There are better things to come as the God, who doesn't avoid the difficult questions, confronts the confusion and the chaos. There is the promise of hope as the God, who doesn't shy away from the most confronting demons, stares down all that's rotten and destructive in this world.

While that good man, Jesus dies, while the sky is darkened and while the terrors of hell seem to get their way, the story is, my friends, far from over!

For you see, in God's commitment to being there in the most difficult of times, in God's resolve to confront the muck and the mess - new life springs forth, a brilliant light shines out of the darkness. The crushing powers of despair, disappointment and failure are silenced and disarmed. And here we are assured there is a future.

Now, friend's that's Good News!

Good Friday is 'good' because God is there, Good Friday is 'good' because God is present. In the confusion and in the messiness of life, God is always there. God is purposely there for you and for me!

And because of this – there is hope. Because of this there is a future. Because of this there is a promise of great things to come. Easter Day is our assurance of that!

So, friends, Good Friday is definitely "good".

Let us, therefore, reverently and quietly spend this day contemplating what this all means. For, I assure you, there is Good News here. On this darkest and most sombre day – things are 'good', they are very 'good'.

Amen.

