

**A Sermon from the Episcopal Parish of
St. John the Evangelist in Hingham, Massachusetts**
Preached by the Rev. Timothy E. Schenck on April 2, 2010 (Good Friday)

TGIF. “Thank God it’s Friday.” You probably never thought you’d hear *that* proclaimed on Good Friday. But I’ll say it again: TGIF. Or more to the point, TGIGF – “Thank God it’s Good Friday.” And we quite literally do “thank God” on this day. Not because it’s an easy day; not because it isn’t viscerally and spiritually painful. But because without the crucifixion there could be no resurrection.

I should be clear about one thing: the Good Friday liturgy is not a burial service for Jesus, though it’s often treated as such. In keeping with the day’s oxymoronic name, this is a day of mixed emotions. It is a day of tragedy and triumph; victory and death; agony and love. The Passion of our Lord refers to both the pain of the crucifixion and Jesus’ passionate love for all of humanity. Which means that even with the emptiness of this day; even with the void left in our hearts as Jesus breathes his last; there is joy in the midst of the hard wood of the cross. Yes, joy. Because as Jesus lays down his life for us, as Jesus hands over his spirit, the meaning of life changes before our very eyes. Our sins are hoisted high upon the cross, paving the way for a life of forgiveness. And we cannot experience the full joy of Easter without first walking the way of the cross. As Bishop Barbara Harris is fond of saying, “We are an Easter people living in a Good Friday world.” Which means the good news of Jesus Christ must be proclaimed even in the darkness of this day. This doesn’t minimize the crucifixion; rather it keeps it firmly rooted in the resurrection.

On the night before he died for us, in the midst of his last meal among his disciples, Jesus took bread and said to the disciples “This is my body.” And Good Friday is all about the body. The body betrayed; the body denied; the body broken.

We often shy away from the physical body of Christ. Perhaps it’s cultural. But on Good Friday, Christ’s body cannot be ignored. It hangs high upon the cross, bearing both the weight of death and the weight of the world.

“This is my body.” Jesus offers himself, his very body, as a sacrifice. A sacrifice for the sins of the whole world; and more to the point for our own sins. It is a personal sacrifice; not a sacrifice in the abstract. Jesus Christ quite literally has a cross to bear and he bears it for you and for me. His sacrifice takes away the sin of the world. Now it’s easy enough for me to speak these words – they roll off the tongue. That Christ died once for all to take away the sin of the world is basic, if bedrock, theology of the Christian faith. And it’s probably just as easy for you to hear these words – they’re familiar. For years, you’ve heard preachers say this or a variation on the theme. But I encourage you to reflect upon them as if hearing them for the first time. Because this is a truly radical message. It’s not just that the sin of the world is taken away; *your* sin is taken away.

You have been redeemed by Christ's sacrifice. Not someone else; not in theory; but *you*. Jesus Christ died on the cross for *you* as well as for all of humanity.

Now we have a role to play here as well. We don't, obviously, add anything to Christ's self-offering; our sins are forgiven. But we can participate in his action by offering ourselves, our souls and bodies, back to God. As Jesus says to the whole world, "This is my body," we can individually respond by offering our own bodies back to Jesus. And in so doing, we hand our lives over to God. Not just a piece of it; not just the parts we like; not just the aspects in which we take pride. But the whole thing. The pains and hurts and sins; the abusive patterns of our lives; the dysfunctions; the burdens we carry.

Today is about Christ's body. The body beaten; the body pierced; the body crucified. Good Friday is all about the body. But so is Easter. Which is why hope and joy accompany our pain and grief. Which is why we can say TGIF on this day. Not glibly or lightly but reverently and profoundly. We are called not to remain at the foot of the cross but to walk the way of the cross. And our journey is not yet finished.