

**Yr. A, Good Friday**

**March 21, 2008**

**Preached by Furman Buchanan**

**St. Martins in the Fields**

**600 words**

**Lessons:**

**Psalm 22**

**Hebrews 10:16-25**

**Isaiah 52:13-53:12**

**John 18:1-19:42**

Why did Jesus have to die?

Was it for the reason that Isaiah foretold?

Isaiah said, “Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted... For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people.”<sup>1</sup>

Isaiah was right, totally right. But that is *not* why Jesus had to die.

Why did Jesus have to die?

Was it because of the reason pointed out by the writer to the Hebrews?

The lesson reads, “Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus...and since we have a great high priest...let us approach ...with our hearts sprinkled clean...and our bodies washed with pure water.”<sup>2</sup>

The writer was correct. But that is *not* why Jesus had to die.

Was it because of the pragmatism of Caiaphas, the high priest, who proclaimed, “It is better to have one person die for the people.”<sup>3</sup>

Actually, Caiaphas was right, totally right. But *that* is not why Jesus had to die.

Was it because of the fear of Pilate, the Roman Governor who passed the question of whether to crucify back to the chief priests?<sup>4</sup>

Pilate did what was right. But *that* is not why Jesus had to die.

Was it because of the Jews who pointed to the Law, and how according to the Law he ought to die because of the things he said about himself?<sup>5</sup>

Actually, the Jews were right, totally right. But that is not why Jesus had to die.

Was it because Jesus himself said, “It is finished” as he bowed his head and gave up his spirit?<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 52:13-53:12

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 10:16-25

<sup>3</sup> John 18:14

<sup>4</sup> John 18:31, 19:4, 15b

<sup>5</sup> John 19:7

<sup>6</sup> John 19:30

We *know* Jesus was right. But even that is not the reason that Jesus had to die.

You see, Jesus did not have to die. The Sovereign God of all there is could choose any way whatsoever to create and care for all of creation...or not.

We believe that God's mighty works clearly reveal to us what God's true nature is. And we believe God's true nature is compassionate, longsuffering, abounding in mercy. In other words, God's true nature is love.

As the writer of the Song of Songs proclaimed, "For love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it."<sup>7</sup> In other words, love is indestructible.

We are created *by* God. And we are created *for* God.  
Let me restate it this way:  
We are created *by love*. And we are created *for love*.

This perfectly explains the new commandment that Jesus gave to his disciples—and that Jesus gave to us—on Maundy Thursday, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this *everyone* will know that you are *my* disciples, if you have love for one another."<sup>8</sup>

Jesus did not have to die, but according to his true nature he did have to love.

And this love led him to the cross.

And the cross is the *perfect* symbol for a *perfect* God who is willing to endure suffering and even death for the sake of a *perfect* love.

Therefore, the cross and Good Friday stand for us at the heart and center of the story of God...at the heart and center of the story of love.

Yes, the cross is indeed the center of this story, but—thanks be to God—it is not the end of it.

Amen.

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<sup>7</sup> Song of Solomon 8:6b-7a

<sup>8</sup> John 13:34-35