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**Good Friday B 2024 –  
“It’s all in the blood”  
John 18: 1 - 11**

**Someone sings: “Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Oh –0 – 0 – oh –, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when they crucified my Lord?”**

**Two young brothers in Kenya were out working in a field, cutting grass. They were swinging long knives at the tall stalks. One young boy stumbled into the path of the other’s knife. He suffered a deep cut to his heel.**

**They dropped their knives and headed immediately for the Mission Hospital. They didn’t even stop to tell their parents where they were going. As the mission doctor labored over the injured boy, the boys’ mother burst through the front door. “How did you know where to find your child?” the doctor asked. “It was easy,” the breathless mother replied. “I just followed the blood.”**

**Just as the mother followed the blood, we also are following the blood this evening. Let’s think back to that day, almost 2000 years ago, when Jesus was crucified. It happened during the week of Passover, when the Jewish people were remembering how God had given them freedom from their captivity in Egypt.**

**At the time of Jesus, they would celebrate that freedom on the Saturday of the week Jesus was crucified. In remembrance of what their ancestors had done, they also would sacrifice lambs at the temple.**

**Blood is an important symbol of the Passover celebration. Thousands of lambs would be sacrificed at the temple altars. The blood of those sacrifices would wash down the temple steps and into the channel that carries it straight to the Brook Kidron.**

**On this night, Jesus had gone to a garden that He and his disciples were very familiar with. Jesus had just finished praying his final earthly prayer. Now, perhaps He and His**

disciples were heading towards a private olive grove for some relaxation. On the way to that grove, they must pass by Brooke Kidron. They cannot miss the sight and the smell of blood. It is everywhere.

But as they settled into that peaceful grove, Judas arrives with his company of soldiers and Temple guards to arrest Jesus. In the gospel of John, Jesus is the one who is in control. John tells us that Jesus knew exactly what He was doing, so He went out to meet this company.

His first question is not, "What are you doing here?" but, "Who is it you want?" One of the soldiers, declares "Jesus of Nazareth" and Jesus answers, "I am He." Remember, once again, Jesus knew what He was doing. He was not only fulfilling the prophecies. He was signing his own death warrant.

Jesus didn't hesitate. He didn't turn away. He knew what He would die for. He would die for us. So, He quickly says, "I am He." We've heard those words before, back in Exodus 3 when Moses comes to the burning bush. God speaks to him out of that bush and says that He wants him to lead His people, Israel, out of Egypt.

Moses is unsure, so he asks if there's some way He can prove who is sending him to do this. God tells him His name, "I am who I am. Then instructs him to tell them, "I Am has sent me." So, Jesus also says His name, "I am." He has nothing to hide and nothing to fear. He does this to protect His disciples, once again fulfilling what has been written in scripture.

Sing: "Were you there when they nailed Him to a tree? Were you there when they nailed Him to a tree? Oh – 0 – 0 – oh –, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when they nailed Him to a tree?"

The next time we hear about blood is in the palace of the Roman governor, Pilate. Jesus has been sent from one official to another during the night, all were hoping to find some way to execute Him. Now the rulers take him to Pilate, the Roman governor, who's been in trouble with the Jews many times before. He knows they don't like him. He knows that if he doesn't do what they want, they will report him to Cesar, and he very well might lose this cushy job.

When he examines Jesus, he tells those who brought Him that he finds no fault in Him. They protest. In a conversation with Jesus, perhaps he gives us his most revealing

**comment: "What is truth?" Pilate had his chance. He stood in the presence of the Light of the World, and he chose darkness.**

**Putting off the decision a little longer, Pilate sends Jesus to be scourged. Maybe that will satisfy these religious leaders, whom he knows are jealous of Jesus. Scourging begins with humiliation. The soldiers stripe Him and put on a purple robe. They call him names; spit on him and braid a crown of thorns and shove it on his head. These make cuts into Jesus' head; a thin stream of blood runs down his face.**

**Next, Jesus is tied to a pillar. His back is bared and a soldier takes a cat-o-nine tails. It is a whip with leather strips on the end. At the end of each leather strip is a jagged piece of metal or pottery. Each lash tears skin. Many don't survive this part of the of the punishment. Now, blood pours down Jesus' back.**

**More than 700 years before, the prophet Isaiah wrote these words about the coming Messiah: "The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed." But scourging is not enough. A decision has to be made.**

**No one can remain neutral in this. Either Jesus is the Messiah or He is a liar and a blasphemer. The religious rulers have made up their minds. They pressure the crowd to pressure Pilate into condemning Him. He is handed over to be crucified.**

**Jesus carries His own cross out to the hill. The rough, splintery wood rubs against the open wounds on Jesus' back. At the top of the hill, named Golgotha, the place of the skull, he is laid down on the cross. Nails are pounded through the flesh of his wrists and ankles. More blood spills out and drips down the wood. But the soldiers ignore it. They are immune to these sights of suffering. In fact, they are so unphased that they play dice beneath his cross for his garment.**

**Max Lucado claims, "This is the most disturbing image surrounding Jesus' crucifixion. These soldiers stood beneath the body of the dying Savior and cast lots for his clothing. They were only a few feet away from the most important moment in all of history, yet they were playing games and gambling for a few dirty clothes."**

**But Lucado asks, "How different are we than those soldiers? How often do we disgrace the faith by the games we play? We aim for status and power in the church. We gossip and take sides. We get caught up in trivial and unimportant matters all the time. Like the soldiers," Lucado says, "we are, so close to the timber, yet so far from the blood . . . so close to the cross but so far from the Christ."**

**Sing: "Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb? Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb? Oh – 0 – 0 – oh –, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when they crucified my Lord? "**

**The trail of blood leads us here to a cemetery. Two of Jesus', secret followers, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, are preparing Jesus body for burial. As they wash away the dried blood, they reflect on the first time each man met Jesus.**

**"I first came to Jesus at night," Nicodemus says. Perhaps it was out of fear of his brethren, after all, he was a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of Israel. Maybe he just wanted to meet Jesus alone? It was to Nicodemus that Jesus said, "You must be born again." It is also to Nicodemus that Jesus, said, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one, and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life."**

**Nicodemus wanted to believe, perhaps more than he wanted to take his next breath. But as the blood runs down and stains the ground at his feet, perhaps he wonders to himself, "I don't know what to believe anymore." Perhaps that is where Good Friday leaves all of Jesus', followers, confused, disappointed and heartbroken. They did not know that Christ's blood had been poured out for them. They could not yet know the joy that lay ahead.**

**Piano plays first 11 notes of first verse of "up from the grave he arose. " "Lo, in the grave, He laid, Jesus, my savior "**