

Sermon
3 April 201
West Kirk of Calder

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Text: Luke 23:32-38

Good Friday

Have you ever seen an accident happen? Watched a toddler fall down a flight of stairs – in horror – without being able to stop it from happening? Or looked on when 2 cars collided – wishing you could have stopped it from happening, frustrated at the fact that your hands are tied?

I think Peter must have felt something like that when Jesus was crucified. Probably hiding in the crowd, feeling guilty, feeling ashamed, feeling sad... Feeling frustrated that he couldn't do anything to stop this from happening. Annoyed with himself that he didn't see it coming and tried to do something to stop it from happening altogether...

To watch someone you love die, is not easy. To watch someone you love die, because he is nailed to a cross, is unthinkable. It's hard to imagine what went through Peter's head on that day.

Even harder to imagine what went through Jesus' head...

Etty Hillesum, a Dutch Jew, wrote a book, entitled: *Trains to hell*. In this book she tells how many of her people were loaded into train trucks, like

cattle on the way to the slaughter house, and then transported to different concentration camps, to places where they could be exterminated, places like Auschwitz.

The people who didn't survive the train journey, because of a lack of food and water, were dumped off the train, station by station; and the rest, who survived the train journey, eventually died at the last station. Literally, in Etty's words – a train to hell.

When I read this, the first image that came to my mind was that of Jesus. Because Jesus' life was also a journey like that. In the old translation of the Apostle's creed it states that: *"We believe in Jesus Christ, who suffered... was crucified, died, was buried, and descended into hell..."*

There were also lots of stations on Jesus' journey to his death on the cross:

- At station number 1 he was rejected by his own people,
- At station number 2 someone from his inner circle delivered him out,
- At station number 3 his closest friend denied that he knew him.

Then the distances between the stations got shorter:

- In less than a day he had an unfair trial, and even though he wasn't guilty as charged – he was condemned to death.
- He got whipped, mocked, spat at, nailed to a cross, given vinegar to quench his thirst, and then he died, crying: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

But – what a comfort we as children of God can find in this journey of suffering Jesus had to go through! Because we can know, no matter how hard our lives sometimes can be, even if our lives sometimes feel like a train to hell, it will never be as hard as Jesus' life was.

Because Jesus' journey didn't end there – he came through the grave to life. And because of that we will never ever have to be without God again.

That's why we call today GOOD Friday – because Jesus' suffering changes every single bit of suffering on *our* journey. *He* was without God, and because of that, *we* will never be without God again.

So in the end, that dreadful day in Peter's life, in Jesus' life, turned out to be good.

Peter had to suffer for 3 long days before he would realize that, but we don't have to, because we know that after Good Friday, Easter Sunday always comes.

So let's *live* like people who know this!

Let's respond to the fact that Jesus hung on that cross for each one of us, with words and acts of love, kindness, generosity, inclusiveness, forgiving, joy...

Because if we don't, it will be as if we are hammering those nails into Jesus' hands all over again:

- Every single time we don't turn the other cheek, †

- We don't walk the extra mile, †
- We don't forgive 70 times 7 times, †
- We don't feed those who are hungry, †
- We don't give something to drink to those who are thirsty, †
- We don't love our neighbour... †

In the eyes of the unbelieving world out there, if we live like this, we will be crucifying Jesus all over again...

Jesus came to take all these loveless things away with his cross – let's never put it back, because not a single one of us would like to stand at the foot of that cross, like Peter did, thinking, *Why did I not do it differently?*

Amen