Hi,

I hope you participated in last evening’s Maundy Thursday service. What a moving experience. If you missed the service, I hope will join us for the Good Friday service tonight. Here are today’s updates:

* **Good Friday service -- tonight, at 7pm. Click** [**here**](https://www.standrewumc.org/live) **or** [**here**](https://www.facebook.com/StAndrewUnitedMethodistChurch/?__tn__=kC-R&eid=ARB5pbKbxPa_6XIU8YaPERugMBtWXi_tDkY1W4byzbhZQdyXOPi9cSTdg0XOoH99mQHPWUf7st6tA8P5&hc_ref=ARQu4f8XrJk3E8FkXmB9bEmw23d9uxIRt3JR1p92Zmg1DCXNfec43LGLyxYjtdLZbwU&fref=nf) **to participate.** Through music and word, we remember Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross with a service of darkness. To prepare for this service, we suggest you light five candles in whatever space you will be worshiping in. As you see a candle extinguished during the service, extinguish one of your own.
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org/). This week’s recordings will all posted.
* If you have any movie or book recommendations you’d like to share with everyone, please send them along.

***Isaiah 53:4-6***

**Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.**

***Matthew 27:27-31***

**Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor’s headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.**

We want to live in a world filled with only goodness and joy and peace. But we don’t . . . and today, Good Friday, is a stark reminder of Jesus’ death on a Roman cross, both challenging our understanding of the way the world works and comforting us in times of trouble.

*Jesus – the suffering servant*

Christians are realists. We do not see the world through rose-colored glasses. We understand that this world is not as God intended. The lives of us all are touched, sometimes shatteringly so, by tragedy and suffering. Indeed, at times, the inexplicable and unjust tragedies of life threaten to overwhelm our trust in God and turn us away from him.

Centuries before Jesus, the prophet Isaiah brought to the Jews a remarkable message. Looking ahead to centuries of exile and oppression that the Jews would endure after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587BC, Isaiah talked of a time to come when Israel would be redeemed not just *from* her suffering but *by* her suffering. In Isaiah 53, this suffering is focused upon a single righteous servant of God upon whom all sins would be laid and through whom all God’s people would be healed.

Now, we shouldn’t imagine that the Jews of Jesus’ day awaited some sort of suffering Messiah in fulfillment of Isaiah 53. They did not. They would read such passages as referring to the suffering of Israel or even the suffering that the Messiah would inflict on Israel’s enemies. Nonetheless, after Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection, the Christians came to understand that Jesus had identified himself with the sufferings of Israel and that through Jesus and his death, the sin of the world had been taken away (John 1:29). Paul and the other Christians didn’t try to proclaim what had happened on the cross, they simply proclaimed that through Jesus’ suffering humanity had been reconciled to God.

*God-who-suffers*

The doctrine of the Trinity is the Christian proclamation that God is inherently relational, that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each fully and completely God, and yet none of them are all of God. From the first days of Christianity, the followers of Jesus proclaimed that Jesus was not only fully and completely human, but also fully and completely divine. Not merely a human enjoying a unique relationship with God, nor even God taking on the appearance of being human. Rather, Christians have always made the remarkable claim that Jesus was God himself, God incarnate, God made flesh. No other major religion on the planet makes this claim. Buddhists do not claim Buddha was God. Muslims do not claim Mohammed was God. Yet, Christians do claim Jesus was God, without surrendering any of his humanness. In the context of today’s symbol, the crown of thorns, our proclamation that Jesus was fully human and fully divine points us to one of the most profound and comforting insights that Christianity offers the world – we proclaim that the great Creator is also the God-who-suffers!

We tell the world of a God who created all that is, who is all-powerful and completely good – a God who *is* love. Yet, we know that we live in a world often filled with pain and suffering. How can this be? Can’t God stop it? Perhaps he isn’t as powerful as we think – or even as good?! I don’t know that there are any fully satisfying answers to these questions. Job wanted explanations for his own sufferings, but he never got them, not even from God.

Paul suffered terribly during the decades of his missionary work across the Mediterranean. He was flogged (at least five times!), stoned, imprisoned, left for dead, shipwrecked, beaten with rods, and so on (2 Corinthians 11:21b-29). Yet, for Paul, the life in Christ was sharing in Christ’s sufferings, confident that he would share in Jesus’ resurrection (Philippians 3:10-11). Later, Peter would write to persecuted Christians, encouraging them in their sufferings and reminding them that “Christ also suffered for you” (1 Peter 2:21).

God is with us, even in (especially in?) our sufferings. God, in the person of Jesus, knows suffering and rejection first-hand. Crucifixion was the most horrible and humiliating punishment the Romans could administer. It is hard for us even to imagine the suffering Jesus endured. But beyond even Jesus’ own suffering is the suffering of God the Father who allowed his own Beloved Son to suffer death on a cross. I cannot really imagine a love like this. I have three sons and there is no one for whom I would allow one of my sons to be crucified. As we contemplate this Good Friday, let us prayerfully reflect upon the power of and depth of God’s love for us. In God’s love we can learn what it means truly to love God and one another.

*A movie recommendation*

When our son, Robby, was about eight years old we took him to see *The Apostle*, starring Robert Duvall, who plays a zealous Pentecostal preacher hiding from his past. Not your typical kid’s movie and we assumed that Robby hated it, but as we left, he said it was really good. He was right. Check it out.

*A book recommendation*

Marsha Byers has offered us a book recommendation: *Valentine* by Elizabeth Wetmore. It explores the lingering effects of a brutal crime on the women of one small Texas oil town in the 1970s. Marsha is an avid reader, so I’m sure it is really good.

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott