**Good Friday, Apr 3, 2015; Is 52:13-53:12; Ps 22; Heb 10:16-25; John 18:1-19:42; Rev Mary Trainor**

My mother, a devout Christian who is soon to turn 99, shares often with me her memories from her early life. There is one particular painful memory that she has been sharing with me over and over again for the past few months. It was apparently a big trauma of her childhood: her mother, in the night from her bedroom in the next room, would cry out as she was experiencing severe pain from advanced rheumatoid arthritis, "Oh God, why don't I die?" The pain was unbearable at times for my grandmother, and my mother to this day (89 years later) still remembers that pain in the depths of her soul. And, that pain makes her sad, it makes her weep for what her beloved mother was going through. That pain also reminds her of how much she loved her mother, and how much her mother loved her.

On this day, Good Friday, we focus on the crucifix: the cross with Jesus nailed to it, the cross where He died, where He sacrificed for us. The story was all given to us in the Passion Gospel reading, and it is horrific: the betrayal, the mocking, the flogging, the imprisoning, the ridicule, the injustice, the nails, the blood. This was all prophesied about the Messiah hundreds of years before, and we read those prophecies in our Isaiah 52 reading today: "***He was despised and rejected by others, a man of suffering...Surely he has borne our infirmities...He was wounded for our transgressions....upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed***." On this day, we focus on both the sadness and the joy, on both the pain Jesus endured for us and on the love Jesus showed for us. Indeed, "***by his bruises we are healed***."

There is a crucifix that is life size, in the crypt below the cathedral in Manila, Philippines. Jesus is on the cross, being crucified. It is a Good Friday cross, not unlike our own here at St. John's. It is different than ours, however, in that this one is painted with many colors, Jesus' head is hanging down low, and He looks to be very near the end. I read about this cross in a recent article by Florida Chaplain David Keck, who had visited the Philippines. Keck tells us that the paint is in good shape except for on Jesus' knees. There is no longer any paint on Jesus' knees. "**Why would this be?**" he wondered. Keck stood near the crucifix for a while, curious to learn something about this phenomenon by observing the people who frequent this church. After a while, a Filipino woman approached, reached up, and put her hand on Jesus' knee. She stood there for a long while, touching Jesus' knee. Then she left. He had solved the mystery: the paint was gone because people had reached out to Jesus on the cross by touching His knees. They came in sorrow, love, and hope. The act of touching His knees blessed them.

In our set of Christian spiritual disciplines, there is the discipline of being fully present with God in silence. We have a time of prayer where we empty our minds of the concerns of our daily lives, and we surrender ourselves fully to the Lord. When distractions emerge, we let them float away, and come back to a place of inner stillness and quiet. On the first Good Friday, the author of today's Gospel, John, was fully present in silence at the foot of the cross on which Jesus died. John tells us that he heard Jesus' last words. Those last words were full both of sorrow and of love: "***It is finished***." It is accomplished, what Jesus came to do.

Today, during this service, you have an opportunity to be fully present with Jesus Christ your Savior. Today, as you reach out and touch the cross in our time of veneration, bring your true self to Jesus, allow yourself the luxury of both being silent and being fully present. Allow yourself to experience the intimacy, the joy, the pain, the love, the hope.

Today, we come to the crucifix just as we are, with our love, our expectations, our regrets, our sins, our weaknesses, our pain, our hopes. As we reach out and touch the cross, we bring all of these thoughts and feelings with us and give them to the Lord....and in the process we are changed; changed not by the wood or the nails or the paint, but by the person of Jesus Christ. Amen.