

## **Good Friday 2010**

**“It is finished.” Jesus hangs on the cross. It’s all over now ... the days and weeks and years in Galilee. The teachings, the healings, the friendships, the confrontations ... they are done. The laughter, the celebrations, the food, the vats and vats and vats of wedding wine ... it seems that all of that happened so long ago, so far away. So much has changed.**

**Jesus hangs on the cross. And with the taste of bitter, spoiled wine upon his lips, he gives up his spirit. It is finished.**

**The world had turned against Jesus and his message of light in the darkness, of bread for the hungry, of waters of endless life. The world had turned against his innocence, his truth, his dignity, his justice, and his peace. The light of God had come shining in the darkness, and it had revealed all sorts of things the world did not want to look at very closely. So the light would have to be extinguished. The darkness demanded it.**

**They had all lined up against him. Judas, the friend who betrayed him and Peter, the friend who could not stand by him. The soldiers of Rome, the occupying empire, and the Temple police, who helped the Romans maintain their power. Pilate, the man charged with keeping the peace, and the shrieking mob that threatened to riot. They had all lined up on the side of darkness. They had all turned their backs to the light.**

**You see, the darkness of this world was far more threatening, far more coercive, far more insistent than the light of the new reality that Jesus proclaimed. And in some sense, maybe you could say that all those people, Judas, Peter, Pilate, the chief priest, the soldiers, the mob, even Barabbas the bandit, were prisoners of that darkness. Even when they could see the light, even when they wanted to follow it, they couldn’t. They were trapped.**

**Many forces trapped them. They were victims of the power of evil, the sway of sin, the inertia of laziness, and the cold shiver of fear. They obeyed the rules of this world, rules like “might makes right,” or “look out for number one,” or “don’t go looking for trouble.” They stood on the side of everything that helps human societies hang together, they complied with the forces of law and order, and they obeyed the laws of the land, the laws of their religions, the laws of human nature.**

**In the end, most of them were just scared. They were afraid of losing whatever security they had. They were afraid of Rome. They were afraid of God. They were afraid of violence, and they were afraid of each other. They were afraid of pain. They were afraid of dying. And it quenched all those fears, for a little while, to turn against the one who tried to teach them not to be afraid. The surge of hatred, the thrill of violence, the power of their conviction was like a strong wine that could anesthetize them and help them forget all those things that the light of God had revealed to them in the person of Jesus. All those things that threatened the forces of this world.**

**So really, not Judas nor Pilate, nor Annas nor Caiphas, nor Peter nor Barabbas nor even the mob caused the death of Jesus. They were just the instruments of larger powers. The powers of darkness opposed Jesus that day in Jerusalem. And really, it was just the cold, broken, hateful reality of human beings living in a terrifyingly mortal world that nailed him to the cross.**

**And Jesus faced them all down with the only weapon at his disposal, his own self. He opened his arms to arrest, betrayal, torture, lies, denials, condemnation, and execution. He embraced them all with his light, his truth, his innocence, his forgiveness and his love. He let himself be hung from that cross so that he could place himself once and for all between us, his human family, and all the forces of darkness that enslave us and destroy us.**

**It's like the gut-wrenching scene in the first movie of the Lord of the Rings trilogy, when a fiery demon rises from the depths of a mountain cave to attack Frodo and his companions as they try to make their way through the tunnels of a mine. They run frantically, trying to reach the tunnel's entrance and the safety of daylight. And finally on a stone bridge over a huge chasm, the wizard Gandalf stops. He sends the rest of the group on to safety, and he turns to face the flaming demon. He plants his tall white staff into the middle of the bridge and shouts at the demon, "You shall not pass!" They battle there on the crumbling bridge until the two of them fall, still struggling, into the endless depths of the chasm, and the rest of the company is saved.**

**In the same way, Jesus plants his passion, cross and death between us and the forces that would claim us for their own ... the darkness of this world, the power of sin, and the frailty of our own humanity. He hangs there, unshakeable, immovable, broken and dying and says, "You shall not pass," to everything that would destroy us.**

**It is finished. In his courage he has destroyed fear. In his last breath he has given us life. In his dying he has destroyed death.**

**And all of us ... everyone--even Peter and Judas and Pilate and Caiaphas and Barabbas and the frightened mob--all of us are free at last, free to flee the darkness, free to step into the light.**