



GOOD FRIDAY TENEBRAE SERVICE  
**How Deep the Father's Love**

MARK 14:32-15:47

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### **Introduction**

I've been deep-sea fishing a number of times. I'm always fascinated by how the color of the water changes as you move out into the deeper parts of the ocean. When you're only in 20 or 30 feet of water, you can see straight to the bottom; and often you can see coral heads and schools of fish.

However, everything becomes increasingly blue the farther out you go: into 50, 70, 90, 120 or more feet. Then, suddenly, as you look over the side of the boat and into the ocean, all you see is a sheet of dark blue, almost black, like the night sky just after sunset.

It's not as though the water itself has become more murky or less clear; nor is it the case that the ocean floor or the marine life have all suddenly disappeared, leaving you nothing to see. No, the only thing that's changed is the depth. And the greater the depth, the more unfathomable, and even frightening, the ocean becomes.

### **The Deepest Depths of the Father's Love**

The love of God is like the ocean. When we're in the shallows, we see God's love clearly and see clearly into it; in fact, we can stand in it, play in it, bathe in it and even bask in it. The world spends much of its time, as do many Christians, in the shallows of God's love: enjoying the warm embrace of a spouse, the smile of a child, the start to a new day, the taste of a good meal, a refreshing rest, an entertaining game, a sunny afternoon—all of these, tokens of God's love toward us. Theologians call it 'common grace.' These are the shallows of God's love because they're all so easy to see and easy to enjoy; there's very little mystery and little that's hard to understand in these simple graces.

However, when we come to the death of Christ upon the cross, we move father out into the depths of God's love; indeed, even out into its deepest depths. For there, as we look over the side of our lives and into the death of the Son of God, things become far less transparent and far more mysterious, even frightening.

How deep the Father's love for us! How vast beyond all measure! That he should give his only Son, to make a wretch his treasure; that the Son should endure the pain of searing loss, as the Father turns his face away; that wounds should mar the chosen One, to bring many sons to glory; that my sin should have held him there upon the cross, until it was accomplished; that his dying breath should bring me life; that I should know that it is finished, there on the cross.

You see, the good thing about Good Friday is that it invites you to move out into these depths, the deeper waters of God's love, and not simply linger by the shore or stay in the shallows. As we hear the testimony of sacred Scripture, how the suffering servant was

sorrowful even to the point of death; how the spotless Lamb of God was led away to the slaughter; how the sovereign Lord of history could be mocked and jeered by crowds and crooks; and how the incarnate God could himself cry out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”—as we hear this gospel story retold, we’re driven far off shore and well beyond our depth, into the deepest depths of the love of God, where it truly is vast beyond all measure.

Some of you have spent much of your life frolicking in the shallows of God’s love; and I suspect you’re quite happy to go on that way, enjoying the simple blessings that may come to you because of God’s unmerited kindness. You find life more understandable that way, certainly more manageable, when you stay in that place where the water only reaches your knees. That makes you feel safe and secure, less out of your depth, you thrust into the unknown.

But there, in the shallows, things are all very predictable and not very profound. But more than that, the shallows of God’s love will not ultimately evoke in your heart the cry of faith. When you’re surrounded by good things, you may well find a measure of contentment and even esteem for a God who has ‘so blessed’ you. But that’s not faith, at least not saving faith, the kind of faith that plunges you into the deepest parts of the heart of God and there lays hold of the profoundest depths of the mercy of God.

On that first Good Friday, there was a man who found himself entirely out of his depth. He hadn’t spent any time with Jesus; he wasn’t one of his disciples. Nor was he even Jewish. He was a Roman, a soldier, in fact. He was a centurion, whose duty it was to oversee something quite routine for him, the crucifixion of what he thought were three run-of-the-mill criminals.

But what he saw on that first Good Friday was something profoundly different. As the Son of God bore the weight of the world’s sin upon his shoulders, he uttered not a single harsh word, but simply let out a loud cry and breathed his last.

Looking on, this Roman soldier, who began his day splashing around in the shallows, found himself peering into the very depths of God’s unfathomable love. And, as though from out of the depths of his own soul, spontaneously welling up from within, he let out his own cry, and said with the voice of saving faith, “Truly this man was the Son of God!”

You see, friend, it is only by looking into the depth of God’s love as it is displayed in Christ’s cross, that a person is ever moved beyond themselves and to the place of faith. You will never get there by playing it safe, by only swimming in the shallows. It’s only when you behold the Man upon the cross, and see your sin upon his shoulders; only when ashamed you hear your mocking voice call out among the scoffers; only when you have let yourself be led out into the depths, will you then find yourself crying out by faith, “Truly this man was the Son of God!”

“God shows his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

## Conclusion

Do you know the love the Father has for us? It is fierce and even unpredictable, precisely because it is holy. It is the farthest thing from an indulgent or superficial or people-pleasing kind of love; it is righteous love, the kind of love that can both harm and heal, put to death and raise up from the dead.

And it is only by letting yourself be taken out of your own depth, and into the depth of God's love in Christ, that you will find yourself simultaneously so full of faith and yet lacking the words to explain it. And then, and only then, will you honestly be able to say,

Why should I gain from His reward?

I cannot give an answer.

But this I know with all my heart,

His wounds have paid my ransom.

Amen.

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