

April 16, 1976

PRESS POOL REPORT--PRESIDENT FORD'S GOOD FRIDAY CHURCH VISIT

The President and Mrs. Ford drove to St. John's Episcopal, arriving just before noon. They were met at curbside by Donald Gray, the head usher, escorted into the sanctuary, and took their places in the Presidential pew (#54--nine rows back from the front). The President waved to a crowd of a couple of hundred as he entered the church.

The sermon was the first of six addresses to be delivered today during the three hour service by the Rector of St. John's, the Rev. John C. Harper. The Rev. Harper's sermon, the first address dealt with Jesus Christ's arrest.

Rev. Harper said that Christ's arrest was a classic example of the conflict between good and evil, and what recently has come to be called the arrogance of power. "Christ had done nothing wrong, legally or morally," Rev. Harper said of the arrest. "His only mistake, if you can call it that, was to challenge authority, and we know from the long sweep of history, that that is never a popular thing to do. Most of the time authority and its challengers remain in a locked battle."

Rev. Harper said that from one viewpoint, "the arrest of Jesus was senseless and unwise, for it allowed him to become a martyr to a few, and a cause to countless men and women for hundreds of years afterwards."

"But from the standpoint of human experience, it was the most natural thing in the world, unavoidable and predictable, because that is the way it is when evil is threatened by holiness and by good people when it feels it must fight back and attack." The Rector concluded his sermon on an optimistic note.

"Christians believe that the cost, which is inevitably down the road for every human life, which rise in nobility to meet the challenge, is the best thing that can happen, for the Cross is the symbol of hope", the Rev. Harper said. He added, "Evil thus knows no hope; goodness does, and our hope lies through the experience of suffering, even betrayal and death, to the victory which proclaims the Easter faith, in the ultimate power, and majesty and light of God, who himself, has overcome evil, and for us has destroyed the power of death."

The President and Mrs. Ford left the sanctuary by a side exit, shortly before 12:30. They were accompanied by the Assistant Minister, the Rev. Peter Larsen. The crowd outside had grown to perhaps 300 or 400. Mr. Ford waved to the crowd as he and Mrs. Ford entered the limousine for the drive back to the White House where they arrived at 12:33 p.m.

(Russ Ward--NBC; Warren Brown--Wash. Post)