

*Good Friday 2017*

*Holy Spirit Parish*

Have you ever been stuck? I don't meet mean inconvenienced, like being stuck in traffic. Or puzzled, like being stuck trying to answer a problem. I mean stuck like you are captured—immobilized as a result of your choices in life; or your personal circumstances; or more broadly the history or system you are a part of. When life seems too much, too big, to ever fix.

That is part of what we hear each year on Good Friday. Whenever we hear the events described in the Gospels from Jesus' arrest to his being placed in the tomb-- it is so awful. Like a bystander we look on and wonder what we could do to save him; or what we would have done if we were there on that day of his death.

We can sympathize with Peter. He wanted to do something-- and he did. He stepped up and with a swing of his sword tried to defend Jesus before he was rebuked once again by his Lord. Then Peter followed to where they took Jesus, perhaps plotting what he could do to rescue him. But Peter was cowed three times—first by a woman, then a small group around a fire, and then by a slave. Cowed so that Peter denied being a disciple of Jesus. Not knowing what to do, then doing the wrong thing and denying what made his life have meaning—being a follower of Jesus. Peter was stuck.

We can sympathize with Caiaphas. He was the high priest that earlier in John's Gospel said it was better for one man to die than for the whole nation to be destroyed (11:50). His interrogation of Jesus is only mentioned in passing in John's Gospel. But you get the sense that he felt stuck—how to do the right thing for the many even if it meant injustice for the one. Caiaphas was stuck.

We can sympathize with Pilate. He is the governor sent from Rome to administer an unruly province far from the capital. You get the sense from the Gospel reading that he felt stuck, too—his judgment was that Jesus is innocent. Yet his duty—or perhaps more accurately his desire to not have any problems disrupt his status as governor—this made him close his eyes to the truth. Pilate was stuck.

Jesus' Passion and death reveal human "stuckness." Not just for the three individuals I just mentioned, but for all of us. Back in Jesus' time, on this holy day, people were stuck—soldiers, bystanders, his followers, his sympathizers. So many people like Peter who did not know what to do; or like Caiaphas who felt he was doing the right thing for the nation; or like Pilate who was willing to ignore what was just in order to keep what was safe.

Where are we in this story? Where are we today? Are we a confused disciple of Jesus trying to do the right thing? A political or religious leader trying to weigh the pluses and minuses of justice? Or are we a bystander, limiting our participation to observing and shaking

our head at the injustice we see? Jesus' death on the cross serves to bring to light the stuckness of being human throughout history and in our own day.

As a student of history, I often feel stuck when I read about injustices committed by my cultural ancestors over so many centuries that harmed so many people. So many examples that I often feel stuck—slavery, conquest, and oppression. Perhaps you feel stuck, too. There are parts of our history that we prefer to ignore-- to whitewash, so to speak.

I remember one example when Lynn and I were going through the Redwood Forests about this time last year. They are so beautiful and magnificent, like our country. And like our country they have a dark history that is hidden in their beauty. You see, Americans came to the Redwood Forests in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. They displaced and killed the native people who had lived peacefully within those forests for thousands of years. They cut down the beautiful redwoods-- organisms that live over ten times the average life of a human being. By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> c., the forests were only 10% of what they had been before we came. Shameful.

We have preserved the forests now and that is good. But the harm done to them and to the people who lived there before is irreparable. We are stuck. And this story is like so many other stories in our history as a nation. How do we make things right when it is so much easier to ignore and “move forward” and tell ourselves, “We are better now—we have learned and we won't do that again.” And yet those we have harmed—including the harm we have done to our own souls—are stuck.

Our stuckness is present not only in the broad human story and our national stories but in our personal and family stories, too. And to be clear, it is always a mixture of good and bad—that is why we feel so stuck. If it was all one way or the other, our lives would be simpler, clearer. We would not feel stuck. But we know the good God calls us to do and to be and how we fall short. It takes great effort to ignore that truth.

That is why we venerate the cross. It is the perpetual sign from God of the truth of our lives—especially the harm we have done and do; and of the great love God has for us that is broader, higher, and deeper than that harm we commit. You see, the worst thing humans have done, the thing that should make us feel the most stuck—the unjust execution of the Son of Man—is the source for our healing.

But it takes some work—mainly the work God has done on our behalf in Jesus. Our work is the work of faith. Do we believe that we are stuck? That we are part of a system and a history—human, national, family, and personal—that has harmed and continues to harm others? In other words, can we confess our sins? As the public confession from *Enriching Our Worship* states it,

God of all mercy, we confess that we have sinned against you, opposing your will in our lives.

We have denied your goodness in each other, in ourselves, and in the world you have created.

We repent of the evil that enslaves us, the evil we have done, and the evil done on our behalf.

Forgive, restore, and strengthen us through our Savior Jesus Christ, that we may abide in your love and serve only your will. Amen.

And do we believe that God loves us in spite of our sin, our stuckness, our living less than what we were designed to be and to do? Do we believe God forgives us? If we do, and confess our sins and believe God's love for us, God will forgive us and heal us. And God also calls us to live a new life by faith, seeking God's justice and forgiving others as God in Christ forgives us. When we do this work of faith, our lives are transformed and we finally become unstuck. Amen.