

Church of Divine love

Sermon Good Friday April 15, 2022

Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Psalm 22; Hebrews 10:16-25; John 18:1-19:42

Sisters and brothers in Christ,

Jesus was arrested, tied up, interrogated, tortured, and executed. After that his executioners took and divided his clothes among themselves. The cross is always a story of suffering and death. There's just no way around it.

There is something about this story that is both attractive and repulsive, compelling, and embarrassing. We glory in the cross and we denounce such violence when it happens in the world today. So why is this story of suffering and death at the heart of our faith? Some say that Jesus suffered and died because we are so bad. I don't agree. I think Jesus suffered and died because we suffer and die. Who among us today has not known suffering, loss, sorrow? Who here has not wept and felt powerless at the suffering and loss of another? Who here has not in some way been touched and affected by death?

The cross is not exclusive to Jesus. It's your story and my story. It's the story of Syria, America, and Ukraine. It's the story of Jews, Muslims, and Christians. It's the story of those we love and those we hate. It's the story of those we know and those we will never meet. It's the human story and the cross stands in the middle of that story. How do you make sense of the cross? What do you do with the world's suffering? How do you understand your suffering? What explanations do you have for the tragedies of life? What do you say when someone asks you about her or his suffering? This is where I get stuck. Maybe we all do. I have no good or easy answers. Do you? In the midst of this insanity the only thing I have is a God who suffers. That's why we cling to and glory in the cross of Christ. It's all we've got.

Jesus is never more real, more human, more embodied, more identified with us, than he is on the cross. It's not at his birth, or in his teaching and preaching, or the miracles he performs, or even at his resurrection. It's on the cross. It's in his suffering and dying. It's in our suffering and dying. Almost everyone ran away from Jesus' cross on that first Good Friday. I don't think it's because they were weak, unfaithful, or bad disciples. It's because the cross of our life is just too damn painful. We want to get away from it. We want to find something good in the horrific. We want to explain away the suffering. We want to make sense of that which makes no sense. We want to flower the cross before it's time and jump from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday.

We cannot, however, get around the cross of suffering and death. We can only go through it. Tonight, does not offer answers to or escape from our sufferings. More than any other day in the church year, tonight holds our sufferings before us. It's a hard day. I don't like it and I don't want to face my sufferings. I suspect you don't either. But there in the middle of our lives stands the cross. What is your story of suffering and loss? When was a time you thought your heart couldn't break any more than it already had? Who are the loved ones you've lost? What is the pain that never goes away? When has your world come to an end? When have you cried in the daytime, but had no answer from God, or by night as well but found no rest (Psalm 22:2)? What suffering do you bring tonight?

I think Jesus truly was an innocent victim of violence and that he was sacrificed. But it wasn't divine violence that sacrificed him, it was human violence. I think Jesus spoke truth to power, the truth of love,

mercy, forgiveness, compassion, justice, hospitality, and he was taken out by that power. What if Jesus' death on the cross did not extinguish the cruelty of the world but exposed and condemned it? What if the crucifixion did not change the world but is calling for change in the world? What if the cross is not a sign of the conquering power of God but a sign that God stands with the innocent conquered by power?

"It is finished," Jesus said. Those are not the final words of a winner. They are the final words of a witness who, God help him, has testified to the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

I wonder if we've spent too much time glorying in the cross of Jesus instead of taking up our cross and following him. I wonder what truth to power you need to speak in your life today

Every day we must decide which we trust more, death or love. That decision in many ways determines our world view, guides our relationships, affects how we approach the circumstances of our lives, and colors our image of God. Can we see and trust the crucified love of Good Friday in our deaths, in the violence of our world, in our losses and sufferings, in the brutalities we experience, in the sins we commit? That is both the challenge, and the hope Good Friday offers.

Jesus does not take us down from our cross. Instead, he gets up on the cross with us. That's it. That's all I have to offer you. That's all I know about this day, and I believe it with all that I am and all that I have. Jesus does not take us down from our cross. Instead, he gets up on the cross with us. Today is not called Easy Friday. It is not called Happy Friday. And it's not called Painless Friday. What is today called? Good Friday? Really? I don't know how or why it's Good Friday. I can only trust that it is, and that somehow Good Friday is what carries us through our sufferings and deaths. It did yesterday. It is today. And it will tomorrow. **Amen.**