

The Rev. Toppie Bates
Homily for Good Friday
April 10, 2020
Matthew 26:36 - 27:54

Let us pray: Today midst our own fears, we have come to sit in the presence of The One Who was fully, Who God created Him to be, every day of His short servant life...Who loved God with all His heart, and with all His soul, and with all His strength, and with all His mind. What He accomplished by God's love shining through Him, He did with no more than His beating heart, two good hands, a holy vision and some companions, showing us humans that everything, even the unimagined, is possible through God. In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Good evening, dear friends. "These are the times that try men's souls," wrote Thomas Paine during the Revolutionary War. It was an American crisis then and 244 years later we are in crisis yet again. History has a way of repeating itself...another painful truth evident today. Families' life disrupted and separated, reality of job insecurity, the economy no longer booming, those tiring benevolent souls on the front line, all are the effects of being attacked by the virus. Crises have a unique way of uniting us though. As way more unites us than divides us, we need each other for collaboration, compassion and comfort. We each are a reminder to the other that our common prayer, rising out of the needs we share, is the necessary mode of survival. For we know we can do nothing without God's help. While we may not be able to foretell the future we know we are able to travel this unknown road together, holding the evidence of past survivals before us as a beacon. And God said, "I am making all things new." And so we wait. In these weeks and months we walk together by faith since that's all we have. And what we have is plenty enough. The Bible stories tell us so. ... "from whence cometh my help? My help cometh from the Lord, who made heaven and earth."

This Good Friday especially now, does prove to be "good". Jesus promises us salvation by His death on the cross and new life by His resurrection three days later. By our very nature we want to rush to the Good News of Sunday but first, today, stop, be still. Look at where you are planted now. God is here and waiting for you and me to recognize that Good Friday is necessary. "Friday is the beginning of change." "Friday is the road to Sunday." "There is no Easter without Good Friday." We need the bitter journey of darkness, for us to more fully recognize and welcome the joys of what is to come. By God's creation every day we live, through the light of day dimming as evening approaches, taking us into the deep long darkness of night. And then when it passes, we know the joy in our hearts as we witness the beauty of dawn and give praise for the light of a new day.

We have just listened to the reading of The Passion of Jesus Christ according to Matthew. The exchanges we heard between the characters actually show us familiar aspects of our own selves. As well known as the story is to us, consider this: We can more fully embrace the story, as we realize that all of humanity possesses in some degree a trait of each of the characters of this Passion Story: there are the disciples

who sit passionately at Jesus' feet but wander, fall asleep, flee out of fear of what might be asked of them / us. There's Benevolent Mother of Jesus whose trials existed out of Her deep love and trust. There are the wailing and helpless bystanders, those in hiding and denial, those who judge, the ambivalent, the self-serving bandits, the guards protecting the power, those who question, there's the traitor, contrasted against those who reach out in generosity and compassion, and then there's Jesus. Yes, we too have a trace of Jesus in our DNA, an imbedded sense of God's abundance and everlasting promise of love and hope...especially in the unforeseen. We each are such a conglomerate of emotions and reactions and Jesus recognizes each intricate part of us...and blesses who we try to be. This drama brings all variances together through Jesus granting us salvation and our witnessing His Resurrection. You and I can find ourselves among the people that fateful day. We can easily identify with those ancient ones wondering what in the world is happening.

The Good Friday transforming story takes us from the Garden in Gethsemane and Jesus' condemnation to His trial and journey to the cross. In our expressions and visions we move alongside Jesus in the drama, our eyes glued on Him, sharing His agony. And when His final breath is taken, we begin our transition with Jesus...in the space of silence...in the wordless void...we get a glimpse through the thin veil between death and new life..between this world and the next. And in the hours between this evening and Resurrection morning, we try to process this transition for our own lives resulting in our ever-expanding faith and prayer.

Jesus' death is leading us to the dawn of a new age, yet again. "In this strange Holy Week we wait and watch the spread of COVID-19 with real concern for the most vulnerable among us. Yet while this virus comes upon us without our being able to properly plan, we are not unprepared. Even on Good Friday, we are an Easter people. as even at the grave, we can sing God's praises. But we have only ever been an Easter people in a Good Friday world. It is at the foot of the cross where we passover from death to new life.

While many of us are cut off from our accustomed places and denied the opportunity to worship next to each other, we are not estranged from God and so we remain in communion with all those with whom the Holy Trinity is in communion. Do you see then, how communion is shared maybe not as we physically know it together here in the nave, but in communion with each other through the Holy Spirit in the Word of Scripture and prayer. This deeper connection is why Jesus would not abandon His love for us even when the cost was faithfulness unto death. And especially in this Holy Week unlike any other, we can experience the very real presence of Jesus in our hearts as we worship, wherever and however that happens.

We recognize In our prayers collectively and personally, the agony of waiting...for anything...for conclusion...the end of the present pain. We are drawn in these trying times to this moment of the cross and Jesus' agony so graphically displayed. We each bring our past experiences of pain and defeat as we unite ourselves with Him. We cling to Him passionately as He clings to the cross. He calls out, searching for God and He soon finds God as His tormented body is released from the agony and pain. Then out of the darkness, "We witness the crucifixion scene transforming into an explosion of triumph. It is as if God responds to the lingering

sound of Jesus' death prayer: the veil of the Temple is torn in half, the earth shakes, the rocks split and the tombs are opened. The Roman soldiers who had kept the death watch over Jesus are astounded and they acclaim Jesus as the true Son of God...Jesus' death marked the end of a world without hope and the beginning of a new age of God's abiding Spirit."

This road from Black Friday to Resurrection Sunday, like each dark night being followed by a new dawn lighting our day, is God's reality for us. We bring to the cross our personal needs for forgiveness and hope, as well as prayers for all the varied and present needs of this wide world. We will witness a new day, soon to come.

Let us pray: Dear God of Eternal Hope, Grant that, as the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on the holy Sabbath, so we may await with him the coming of the third day, and rise with him to newness of life; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*