

Good Friday, Yr. A

April 5, 2020

Isaiah 52:13-53:12, John 18:1-10:12

I'm sure it has occurred to all of us, at some point over the years, to wonder why in the world today is called Good Friday. In the Orthodox tradition, it's called GREAT Friday. I doubt that Jesus' followers would have used those adjectives. They probably would have said Foul Friday or Frightful Friday. They didn't have the advantage that day, of know how the story was going to end. If we try to put ourselves in their place, we get some glimpse of what they would have felt. We heard one of the passion narratives today, the one from John. But last Sunday, we heard from Matthew. And he, like Luke and Mark tell a story that is more raw in its immediacy and its suffering. John's gospel is different. And it's consistent with John's theology, going all the way back to the beginning of his Gospel, that Jesus was IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD AND THE WORD WAS WITH GOD AND THE WORD WAS GOD.

We've talked before about how some of the Gospels emphasize the humanity of Jesus. Mark would be the perfect example. That's sometimes called LOW Christology. But John is the perfect example of the opposite – of HIGH Christology. John emphasizes the divine side of Jesus. Where in other gospels, for instance,

there's that cry, My God, my God, why have you abandoned me, in John, Jesus is not a victim. He's very much in control. There's nothing about the agony in Gethsemane, no bloody sweat, no anguished prayer to be released from drinking this cup. You'll note there's no Roman power either: when the soldiers come for him and Jesus says, "I am he," the text says that the soldiers fell to the ground. Jesus would go with them willingly or not at all. They weren't in charge; he was. He doesn't need help carrying the cross. And even after he was crucified, Jesus continues to think of and care for others – hence the part where he gives his mother into the care of John.

Consistent with that theology, when Pilate asks Jesus if he is a king, Jesus doesn't deny it but tells Pilate that his Kingdom is not of this world. In effect, he's saying that he is indeed King, not only of the Jews, but of the entire creation.

And then there's that conversation about truth. When Jesus says that he has come to testify to the truth, we get Pilate's world-weary and cynical response. WHAT IS TRUTH?

When I was practicing law, I remember thinking that the system would work much better if everyone simply told the truth. And in today's world, where image and spin and outright lying seem to control our discourse, truth, it seems is more precious and more needed than ever.

So here we have Jesus who has lived the truth of a loving, healing, forgiving God his entire life, surrounded by lies.

First there's Judas, whose betrayal exposed the lies of his heart. He denied the truth of his experience of Jesus. Some sympathetic commentators suggest that maybe Judas betrayed Jesus because he was tired of waiting for him to call upon those legions of angels to get rid of the Romans. He thought he could force the issue.

And then Peter. First Peter fell into the lie that violence is the answer by drawing and using his sword. And then, when he went into the courtyard he fell into the lie of his own courage and self-sufficiency. Remember him saying: NO MATTER WHAT, I'LL NEVER DENY YOU? But when put to the test, he lied by saying, NO WAY, I DON'T KNOW THIS MAN. But in a way, Peter really didn't know THIS man, this Jesus as he now stood, seemingly powerless and defeated. He knew that OTHER Jesus, the one who worked miracles and seemed destined to ride to glory.

And then Pilate. His lie was that he thought that political expediency was the most important thing. He was in Palestine, that troublesome assignment for a Roman, by way of appointment by the Emperor Tiberias who was, by all accounts, a paranoid, suspicious, jealous tyrant. Pilate had already been in trouble with Rome so he wanted to handle the current situation in a way that didn't further

enrage the leaders who were standing in front of him demanding crucifixion or the crowds that were howling for the same thing.

The lie for all of them and the on-going temptation for every human is that this world works on the principle that might makes right and that expediency and self-protection are what are called for.

But Jesus' message was entirely different. It was that love is more powerful than any worldly might; in fact that love is more powerful than death itself. That God is about life and love and that we can afford to be about those things as well.

When we talked on Palm Sunday, I mentioned that Hosanna means SAVE US. And you may remember that the version of the passion we heard that day, from Matthew, had passersby taunting Jesus, saying, OK, save yourself and us, come down from the cross. If Jesus had chosen to respond, I'm thinking he would have said something like, THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT I'M DOING. I'M TAKING ALL THE POSSIBLE HUMAN SUFFERING ON TO MYSELF and because it will be overcome in the Resurrection, I'M SHOWING YOU THAT ESSENTIAL, LIFE-GIVING TRUTH – THAT LIFE AND LOVE ARE FOREVER AND THAT YOU NEVER HAVE TO BE AFRAID.

And that my dear people of God: that is the truth that saves us.

Amen.