

10 April 2020

Good Friday

The Passion According to John (18:1-19:42)

Sometimes there are no words. That's true after encountering a story of suffering. That's true of how I feel after hearing the passion story. That's how I will feel when I come to venerate the cross in a few minutes. Sometimes there are no words. Our response we hold deep in our hearts.

Sometimes there are no words. That's how an article began about the experience of Tony Sizemore in recent weeks. His wife, Birdie, in her sixties, was the first Indiana resident to die of the coronavirus. He was interviewed for a newspaper, with his photograph included, looking in a state of sullen shock, the suffering servant of Isaiah in our midst. He was questioned about his experience of loss. All he said on that was "She's dead, and I am quarantined. That's how the story ends." He spoke more, telling stories about his wife, Birdie, and the interviewer was kind enough to let him go on without pressing him more about his experience of loss. Love has taken Tony to the foot of the cross where there are no words. That's the story. No good news to report.

And on that first Good Friday, it was the same. No good news to report. Theories and doctrines came later about how his death saved us, but that day, it was only loss and grief. No words from his mother and friend who stood beneath him and witnessed it all. Love took them to the foot of the cross.

In times of our own sickness, humiliation, and pain, we may or may not have a shimmer of hope. Probably for all of us there are times when all we can do is bring ourselves to the foot of the cross, without words, but not alone.

You might have noticed that at the beginning of this liturgy, I fell on my face (intentionally) and lay flat on the floor at the foot of the cross. I remember one other time that I did that outside of the Good Friday liturgy. I was emotionally distraught, really frustrated and sad and grieving...and I happened to be walking by the church. I walked in and just like today walked up to the cross and laid down flat on my face and just stayed there for several minutes. It wasn't particularly consoling. But it was good to have a place to go.

Sometimes the only place to go is the foot of the cross.

I have a friend with a great gift of reflection who was visiting his parish church last week, geographically closer to the suffering and death of the virus than I am. He was drawn to the Station of the Cross plaques along the walls of the church, and the connections to our current crisis starting flowing with little effort. Jesus is condemned to die. Ironically, Pilate tries to escape responsibility by washing his hands, as we're all supposed to do now. Jesus' life sentence reminds is a confirmation of our own mortality. We will all die. Jesus takes up his cross and will fall under its weight three times. The loneliness of our journey sometimes. Simon helps Jesus carry the cross reminded him of the nurses, other health professionals, the grocery workers and others who help us survive with their essential services, services they did not necessarily sign up for, like Simon who was pressed into service.

Jesus meets his mother, and our pain of knowing your dying will come at a great cost to others. Jesus is crucified. The sheer physical pain of those who suffer with this virus. Victims of crucifixion dies not

from the nail wounds but from suffocation, unable to hold up their chests. Coronavirus leads to the same.

My friend concluded that he was so grateful that our Church has such a tradition as the Stations of the Cross that help us be with our suffering, when there are no words.

And in this liturgy when we are asked to come forward and venerate the cross, there are no words; there is no verbal response asked of us. We simply bring our lives as they are with our worries, our guilt our fear, our compassion and both honor and seek the companionship of him who died for us. In silence we bring ourselves to the foot of the cross.