

Sermon for Good Friday, 2024

Who do you identify with in the Good Friday story? I like to think I would have been one of those brave women, who stood with Jesus throughout his suffering, who had the courage to be present with him, in spite of the possible danger to themselves. You remember: Mary his mother, his unnamed aunt, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the wife of Cleopas. According to the other gospels, it included Salome, the mothers of some of the disciples, other women who had travelled with Jesus. I like to think I would have been one of them. Standing there bravely while the 12 apostles were nowhere to be seen.

Of course, some days I also identify with Jesus, misunderstood, suffering. Or even sometimes being willing to suffer for those I love. No one else in the story really comes out looking good, do they? The 12 apostles, who swear eternal faithfulness and run away as soon as the soldiers appear. Peter follows along and then denies even knowing Jesus. To say nothing of Judas, who betrayed him.

The Jewish leadership, who ask if Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and then, when he acknowledges it, say he's guilty of blasphemy. Of course, it wouldn't be blasphemy if it was true. But they don't consider that possibility. And then they take him to Pilate to have him executed and bring all sorts of false accusations against him and stir up the crowd to demand his execution. They closed their minds and were willing to be unjust in order to preserve their own positions of power and influence.

Pilate thinks Jesus is innocent and tries half-heartedly to have him set free. But he doesn't care enough about justice to continue when he sees a riot beginning, so he gives the order to crucify Jesus. His sin is apathy. Just not caring that much. The soldiers are just doing their job. They don't question whether it's a good job or not.

And the crowds, shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David" one day and a few days later shouting "Crucify him!" They're easily swayed, going along with whoever's loudest. Getting all excited about something they know nothing about. Kind of reminds me of some of the political rallies we see, where everyone starts chanting slogans without actually researching whether they're true or not. Or what they mean. If anything.

So I like to think I would be one of the brave women. And you know, some days I'm like that. But other days, not so much. Some days I'm afraid and I run away instead of staying to support someone who's being bullied. Some days I do things to maintain my position of privilege. Some days I just don't care enough to stand up for what I know is right, especially if it might cost me. Some days I go along with the crowd.... Don't we all? Don't we all do these things? Don't we all succumb to our baser human nature sometimes? Haven't we all done those things which we ought not to have done and left undone those things which we ought to have done?

And you know, it's for people just like me, just like all of us, that Jesus came and lived and suffered and died. Jesus came for people like us: regular, ordinary, weak, flawed

human beings, who sometimes rise to great heights and other times not so much. He came for the sinners, not so much the righteous, the sick, not the healthy who don't need a doctor

Jesus came to earth because God loves us. All of us. Just as we really are. The good and the bad. And all of us in between. And because God loves us, God wants better for us than we usually manage on our own. God wants us to live in peace, harmony, plenty, in good relationships with God and other people and the earth that supports us and all our relatives who live on this planet. And God isn't the type to give up on us. Out of God's great love for us, the Son came to be incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth. And he showed us how to live and how to love. And he confronted those who were in power to show them a better way, as we discussed on Palm Sunday. And he accepted the consequences of challenging them. And he was prepared to die rather than harming anyone or going against what he believed God was calling him to, the principles of the Kingdom of God.

I believe Jesus' death was for us. I believe he died to show us how to live. To show us that there is another way of living that does not rely on having power over other people, that does not rely on hurting people or taking what they need so we'll have more, that might cost us a lot, but which is still better. I believe Jesus came to show us how to love one another, even to the death. His willingness to stand up for us even though it cost him his life, sets an example for us. And when human beings put him to death, he continued to love us. He forgave us from the cross, even as we were killing him. He came to show us that there is nothing at all that we can do that will stop God from loving us and forgiving us. He came to show us, not just tell us, how much God loves us.

It is God's love that saves us, heals us, rescues us, brings us to our senses, helps us grow into the people God would like us to be. And God's love is nowhere shown so clearly as on the cross, when the Son of God allowed us to kill him and forgave us from the cross. That forgiveness and love echo down the centuries. That forgiveness is offered to each of us today. And every day. That love is offered to us today, and every day.

And the more fully we accept God's transforming love into our lives, the more fully we will become like Jesus, the Son of God. The more we will care about our neighbours and even our enemies. The more we will be motivated to do them good and not harm. The more we will be able to forgive them, and love them, even if they do not reciprocate. The more we will create here a world that is more like the world God dreamed of, a world in which neither the Son of God, nor anyone else, would be sacrificed because of human sin. Of course, this is a long process, the work of a lifetime, the Spirit's work throughout our lives. Helping us up when we fall – as we do – but never giving up on us. Always loving us, forgiving us, transforming us into the likeness of Christ.

This day, may we more fully than ever before, accept the gift that Jesus gave us by dying for us on the cross all those years ago, the gift of love, forgiveness and healing from God. The gift of oneness with God. May we surrender to that love and let it sustain us and transform us throughout our lives and beyond. Amen