



The Reverend Anthony Estes, Assistant Rector
Sermon
Good Friday
April 2, 2021

Readings: Isaiah 52:13—53:12; Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9
Psalm 22:1-21
Gospel: John 18:1—19:42

The Darkness of Good Friday

I recently found a quote from the Tao Te Ching, a collection of Chinese texts that I found stirring as I prepared today's reflection:

"Darkness within darkness. The gateway to all understanding."

How can I...and how are we...being invited into the darkness of Good Friday?

And how are we being invited to try...to discover meaning and understanding in its crushing brutality?

As I read the passion narrative this year, I found it difficult to enter its darkness...because I was bowled over by the absurdity of it all.

After Jesus had finished supper with his friends, he's in an olive grove near the Kidron Valley, nestled between the Temple Mount and the Mount of Olives. And, in my imagination, the quiet darkness of that night is disturbed when temple guards and a contingent of Roman soldiers approach the *light of the world* with hungry and angry torches and lanterns.

They approach *the giver of peace* with weapons...and arrest him...and bind him.

When he was questioned by religious authorities pertaining to his teachings and his ideas and he answers, he is accused of treason and blasphemy...when he says that all he came to do was to testify to the truth.

Ultimately, he is tried and convicted and sentenced to the most gruesome and barbaric death possible...a crucifixion.

How does such a thing happen to someone so innocent? And why would this moment play a central role in the development of a religion that has adherence all over the world?

I think for one thing we — I — are being invited to search for the meaning in the darkness of Good Friday, so we can more clearly see ourselves...more clearly see the implications of human allegiance to power...and the consequences of our unwillingness to admit our own failings.

Ultimately, this proves the point of what Jesus taught: Jesus says in John 3 [vv. 17-19] that he did not come into the world to *condemn* the world. And just as he didn't condemn the world *then*, he doesn't condemn us *now*.

Rather, we are condemned *already*...because we do not believe — we do not accept — the truth that Jesus proclaims: And that is we *need* God, even if we think we already *have* God.

We need to be in relationship with God.
We need to be in relationship with each other.

We need to see that the way of peace is *not* the same as the way of power.

We need to see that we have built, and we build systems and temples that enshrine our jaded sense of righteousness, that perpetuate racism and anti-Semitism, that leaves out of touch with the life of God, because we forget that we *live* for the *sake* of God and for each other.

And when we don't believe that...when we don't admit that...when we won't repent of that...we perpetuate great violence against God...and one another.

And, yet...that God loves us...and forgives us, *even* as God in Jesus bears the brunt of human brutality and blindness on that cross!

He forgives those who *know exactly* what they are doing, just as much as he forgives those who *don't*.

It is his innocence —and his willingness to submit to the consequence of human hubris — that somehow...saves us...all.

And that somehow by the darkness of that day, we can *finally* see ourselves...
and be *healed* from violence...
brought out of error and *live* in the truth that we are *loved*
and that we *can love* God with all our heart and minds and souls and bodies and strengths
and passions and hobbies and social identities...
and...love our neighbors with open hearts and open hands and open heads and open ears.

That we can love God...without fear.
And that we can love one another...without reserve.

I don't know why the innocent die.

And I don't know why, when they *do*...it somehow wakens us from slumber.

I don't know why Breonna Taylor died almost a year ago this month.

But I *do* know that since her death...people are starting to see more clearly, perhaps for the first time, that human systems and policies and cultural biases are keeping us from being God's dream for the world.

We are also becoming more aware of how our words, how church words, like the use of the noun "*Jew*" in John's gospel, can be co-opted for anti-Semitic purposes.

And that calling for justice for Breonna and using the more specific term "*Judeans*" (which disrupts assumptions by locating Jesus in a particular geographical and political and cultural milieu) ...

These are just two ways by which we can enter the darkness of human experience and find understanding...
and empathy...
and compassion.

Every Holy Week, every Good Friday, we are called to reorient ourselves to its darkness...so that we can more clearly *see* and *appreciate* the light of the pascal flame that burns in our hearts.

We can more clearly see the fire of love, the purging fire of the Holy Ghost that burns and reduces to ash anything that is not who and what God is. That is not who and what Jesus is. That is not who we are called to be with God and with creation.

Love...and the preaching of this cross...is foolishness to those that are perishing. To those who refuse to see; for those who refuse to look.

But to those who believe, it is the power of God unto salvation.