



SAINT LUKE'S

GOOD FRIDAY

ISAIAH 52:13-53:12

PSALM 22

HEBREWS 4:14-16; 5:7-9

JOHN 18:1-19:42

A SERMON BY THE REV. CAROLINE STACEY

APRIL 19, 2019

*Any time not spent on love is wasted.*¹ These words by the 16th century Italian poet Torquato Tasso are often quoted in the context of romantic love. Today Jesus deepens our understanding of love itself. On the Cross, Jesus' full humanity is on display – vulnerable and subject to evil and death, just like us.

Jesus' death is *not* necessary or inevitable, except politically for Caiaphas and for Pilate. It wasn't necessary for God. We try and make sense of the Cross. We have constructed theologies around its necessity: atonement theologies. We say in the Eucharistic Preface for Holy Week: *Who for our sins was lifted high upon the Cross, that he might draw the whole world to himself*² – but really, it is more accurate to say: *who by our sins was lifted high upon the Cross*. More recently, jettisoning atonement theologies, some theologians³ point to the scapegoating instinct in humans as the root cause of Jesus' death. This is surely getting closer. The Crucifixion is not inevitable because everyone in this tragedy has free-will, but given human nature the Crucifixion is unavoidable. Not necessary, not inevitable, but unavoidable. As we mature in our understanding of God's love, our theology *should* continue to grow and evolve. We are still developing theologies of the Cross because its

¹ *Aminta* (1573): Torquato Tasso

² *BCP* p.379

³ eg. *Rene Girard*

mystery and power is never exhausted. As Jesus promises in John's gospel, the Holy Spirit is still leading us into all truth.⁴ However we come to the Cross today, we will have theological company.

It is certainly easier for us if we see those participating in the trial, the whipping, the denying, the nailing as more flawed than we are. It is one of the things we do to distance ourselves from Jesus' death. But they are us. Their sins are our own. Failure to pay attention. Failure to speak up. The self-serving greed of Judas. The fear of Peter. The anxious expediency of Pilate. Some simply look the other way, distracted by other claims on their time and compassion. *After* the crucifixion, the centurion realizes "this man was innocent".⁵ *After* the death, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus step forward to honor Jesus.⁶

Today we are bombarded with more bids for our attention than ever before. Day and night our phones receive messages which are in our face the moment we look at the screen. Each item - celebrity newsflash or deadly earthquake - gets equal banner space. Technology cannot tell the difference between the trivial and the monumental. With God's help, *we* can. Today can help us re-focus our lives. We can

⁴ John 14:26; 16:13

⁵ Matthew 27:54; Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47

⁶ John 19: 38-39

choose to give our attention to what matters most. *Any time not spent on love is wasted.*

A physician friend said to me years ago: “There are a lot worse ways to die than crucifixion.” As a pediatrician, she witnessed the prolonged suffering of some of her patients – children, and their parents. I understand her clinical approach to quantifying degrees of suffering. And yet, surely that is not the heart of Good Friday. We don’t need to quantify suffering to weep with Jesus today. Even the most privileged, fortunate lives will have their portion of suffering in due course. We can all connect with Jesus’ suffering in some way. Who among us has not experienced some form of exclusion, injustice, loneliness, fear, violence, pain, betrayal by fair-weather friends or those we counted as friends who later turn out to be simply advancing their own interests? The Cross connects our human experience with Jesus’ human experience once and for all – not through the specifics but through suffering itself. God stands with us today from the ground up, not top down. There are two raisings of Jesus. Before Christ is raised from the grave he is raised on the Cross. The Cross builds an indissoluble bridge between us and God, not in buying us back from God’s eternal punishment for our sinfulness, but through sharing in the human experience of loss and suffering. We can trust a Messiah who is not Teflon,

who doesn't always succeed, who dies in shame, rejected even by his own faith community. We can trust Jesus' full humanity to understand and come alongside our own.

In three days' time, we will look back at the Cross and see that Jesus' full divinity is revealed today too. His divinity is veiled today, but the *way* Jesus loves from the Cross is Divine. Not Divine in a sense that it is remote and beyond us, Divine in that this self-offering love is the image of God in all of us. This is the path of love we are created to follow. Divine love is not separate from human love, it is the deep wellspring from which we draw our cups of water and are given our portion of life and love. This love can flow through us, too.

Jesus shows us that Love is always laying our life down. This is the heart of the Good Friday. Even on the Cross, Jesus transcends self-interested love. Even today, Jesus looks outwards in concern. He creates new families: *Woman behold your son; behold your mother.* He knits his beloved together even as he leaves them. Jesus points us towards love of neighbor for as long as we have the opportunity to show love on this earth. *Any time not spent on love is wasted.*

AMEN

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