

Squamish United Church
Rev. Karen Millard
Good Friday

April 14, 2017

This Friday

It was on the Friday that they ended it all.
Of course, they didn't do it one by one,
They weren't brave enough.
All the stones thrown at one time
or no stones thrown at all.
They did it in crowds...
in crowds where you can feel safe
and lose yourself and shout things
you would never shout on your own, and do things
you would never do
if you felt the camera was watching you.
It was a crowd in the church that did it,
and a crowd in the civil service that did it,
and a crowd in the street that did it,
and a crowd on the hill that did it.
And he said nothing.
He took the insults, the bruises, the spit on the face,
the thongs on the back,
the causes in the ears.
He took the sight of his friends turning away, running away.
And he said nothing.
He let them do their worst until their worst was done,
as on Friday they ended it all...
and would have finished themselves had he not cried,
"Father, forgive them...."
And began the revolution.

Every year in Holy Week I realize how frighteningly possible this story is. I realize that it would be much easier for all of us to skip the death and move from the parade of the palms into the resurrection celebration. In our life and in our world most of the time we just want to go from party to party. This year the images of crowds protesting is pretty easy to imagine. This year I find the idea of political leaders being corrupt and killing that which is good far too realistic. I have seen more tears of fear and sadness for our world in the last months than ever before.

Perhaps that makes this story more realistic this year or perhaps it makes us want to avoid it all the more.

This Friday is a dark day that speaks to the reality of the challenge of life. Life is not one big party. Of course life has its parties, we wouldn't survive if it didn't, but there is no question that it has its fair share of crosses and deaths as well.

Good Friday is the day where we are forced to acknowledge that our world, our human nature, and we as individuals do not always get it right. We do not always choose wisely, and just because there is a group of people or a crowd screaming for a cause they do not always get it right either. In fact they often have it wrong.

Every Good Friday I enter this service with both trepidation and a heavy heart

I come to this historical event with a mixture of theologies and contexts

And yet this day speaks to the core of my faith, and its intersection with life.

This day is not about how Jesus died but why he died.

These palm branches that lay before us, remind us of "Hosanna's" shouted Just a few days ago. A call for salvation, an anti-establishment protest. Less than a week ago we remembered Jesus' brave entry into Jerusalem; where he stared into a jumble of eyes that offered honour and injustice, wonder and mockery, love and hatred, life and death all muddled together. He knew he was risking it all. He knew he was going against everything the authorities would desire. But he longed for a different world.

Soon after his triumphant entry Jesus confronted the corruption in the temple. He challenged the arrogance and exclusion of the authorities as they attempted to trip him up with questions of paying taxes and following laws.

One author wrote "Whenever I enter into the story of Lent and observe the path that Jesus walked to the cross, I am struck by his quiet equanimity in the midst of a whirling storm of threats and danger. Once the horrendous events of his last days were triggered, he took each moment with resolute openness of heart and apparent fearlessness. "Fear not" he had taught his disciples, and he was showing them in those last days how that imperative is lived out. Physically, emotionally, and spiritually he was threatened from all sides."

As the palms stopped waving Jesus faced an interrogation of Pharisees, Sadducees and Romans. And so, he reminded religious leaders of their scriptures and the commandment to love God and neighbour. But this truth telling only agitated them more. They demanded to know how this carpenter dare to tell them to love? How he would dare to tell them that what the poor choose to give is as good as the abundant wealth they offer? How dare he tell them that those they have judged are worthy of more?

He dares because his love is abundant. So abundant that his compassion led him to experience a betrayal of the deepest kind. For in the face of love a close companion sells him for a just little wealth.

On this Friday every year love, compassion, and grace stand trial. For in front of every station of life he is charged as a scandalous criminal. Power takes over, crowd mentality takes over, pride takes over, fear takes over and he is physically beaten and led to the cross. And then fear takes over even his closest community of friends as most of them abandoned him in his hour of greatest need.

“As the scriptures show, Jesus was fully aware that these terrible events would lead to his annihilation, yet the gospel story does not speak of him having fear. Instead, there is quiet dignity in his response. Grounded in his truth, he speaks loving words of forgiveness; he reaches out with quiet assurance; and in the fullness of his vulnerable humanity, surrenders to whatever arises in each harsh moment.”

On this Friday every year my heart breaks open with the psalmist and Christ as we cry out why? Why God have you forsaken him? Does it really have to be this way. Do we really have to die to find new life? Today my daughters' questions ring in my ears “Why would people kill Jesus?” “Why did God make mean people?” “Why did God make me so bad, I wish I could be good all the time?” “How come people follow bullies?” “I'll never follow the bullies...” And I want to protect her from this cruel, cruel world. And I hope and I long for a different world. I wish she would never need to understand this story because life for her should just go from party to party. And then I think about the state of our world and I know the truth. Until recently I thought I would never see war. I am no longer certain of that. Why God? Why? How can we do such injustice? How can we offer such hate?

This Friday reminds us that unconditional love brings to the untrusting great fear. To look in the face of Jesus brought crisis to humankind because it called for them to be different than who they were, it called for them to be transformed.

As this mock trial ends even the authors of our scriptures seem to find it hard to bear the horror of the story; for we are left only to imagine the depth of pain and suffering. Jesus carries his cross until he can carry it no more, and then a stranger journeys with him to the place of the skull where they crucify him.

This death and suffering like all death and suffering confronts us. And yet this moment stares us straight in the face and says this is what we do with love. This is what we do when we choose to oppress, and ridicule, and set apart those who are not worthy of our company. For in that we say they are not worthy of

God, or Christ, or even love. We say they are worthy of condemnation or even death. It is not God who calls them unworthy. Jesus does not say some are not worthy of acceptance, he died to prove otherwise.

So as you look this day into the face of the crucified Christ know that he is love, and know that he understands your pain, your places of rejection, your innocence, your guilt and your grief and he loves you anyway. God's Friday calls us to grieve injustice; our own, and that of others. This Friday reminds us that our God has known the darkest of times and grieves with us every step of our journey.

This Friday reminds us that as people continue to suffer from oppression, violence, slavery, and injustice Jesus continues to be crucified. And so today we must ask ourselves are we willing to stand out from the crowd; and maybe even as Simon have the cross thrust upon us, if only for a little while. Are we willing to stand up for love? For, following Jesus brings the danger of feeling the sorrow and the pain of a groaning world. We may not be in danger of dying for our faith, but we are in danger of having our hearts broken, of receiving upon our very souls the wounds of the world.

“Perhaps more often than we know, we are presented with times of being seized from the crowd, and the cross is thrust upon us. As we accompany those who are sick until death. As we walk with the broken and lost. As we advocate for the homeless, the addicted and the mentally ill in our community. As we stand up against the injustice of women raped and abused. As we comfort the family whose loved one has just been murdered. As we welcome and support the refugee who has been imprisoned and tortured. As we bear witness to a world dying of AIDS, of tribal slaughter, of environmental toxins, of child prostitution, of terrorism, of human trafficking. As we look unflinchingly at the world and refuse to pretend it is different than it is, to ignore it and walk on, but rather, be willing to carry Jesus' cross for a little while. Like Simon of Cyrene, we are not in danger of dying, but if we truly follow Jesus, we are in danger of living, of living fully into his passion.”

This Friday we are reminded that we have the opportunity to be truth and love. This Friday may we pray for the grace and faithfulness to not hide our faces from his pain and suffering, reflected in the world today, but to embrace them and carry them, if only for a time. Don't dismiss it, although that is the easiest thing to do. Don't turn from the face of love in unbelief. This Friday, Live love so that, that piece of work which Jesus finished in his death we will accomplish in your life.

May it be so. Amen.