

Squamish United Church
Rev. Karen Millard
Good Friday

April 3, 2015

Recognizing the Cross

They went out and followed him,

Those who had sat with him at the table.

He led them to a garden

Where he prayed while they slept.

He was kissed,

And because he was kissed he was arrested,

And when he was arrested, his friends fled,

Some to go into hiding,

One to stand beside a bonfire,

And say I never knew him,

I never knew him...

Until the cock crowed.

He was brought before the religious authorities

And accused of the sin of blasphemy

And of threatening insurrection.

Having no power to deal with him,

They handed him over to the state governor,

Who listened to the accusations

And then asked the accused

What have you to say?

To which the response was silence.

He had said it all.

He was not found to be guilty of any criminal charges

But because he was an embarrassment,

It was decided that the people should determine his fate.

They shouted

Crucify him!

Crucify him!

Crucify him!

He was cursed and spat on,

Whipped and humiliated.

And on his shoulders a cross was placed,

Which he accepted with grace.

Under the weight of it

He stumbled and fell

Stumbled and fell
All the way to Calvary.

On top of a garbage dump,
He was nailed to a cross of wood
And left to die,
While soldiers gambled,
Critics joked,
Religious leaders smiled with satisfaction
And his mother watched and waited

Why are we here today on this horrific Friday in the story of our faith?
Would it not be much easier to refresh the palms that are strewn upon the floor and celebrate
once again with a parade?

Why would we want to engage in this dark day?

Why enter into such a gruesome story?

I do so with both trepidation and a heavy heart

I do so with a mixture of theologies and contexts

And yet it is

this story that speaks to the core of our faith,

for me not because of how Jesus died but why he died.

These palm branches that lay before us were waving in celebration of salvation, as we shouted
“Hosanna’s” Just a few days ago. On that day we remembered Jesus’ brave entry into Jerusalem;
his courageous entry into the place where he stared into a jumble of eyes that offered honour and
injustice, wonder and mockery, love and hatred, life and death array.

It was not long after his triumphant entrance into Jerusalem that 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.

As the palms stopped waving Jesus faced an interrogation of Pharisees, Sadducees and Romans
challenging his version of the truth. 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 dare to tell them
that what the poor choose to give is as good as the abundant wealth from which they offer? How
dare he tell them that those they have judged are worthy of more? How dare he?

How could he dare to show such compassion? A compassion that led him to experience a
betrayal of the deepest kind. A betrayal so disturbing so repulsive it’s hard to believe it is a
betrayal of humankind. For in the face of love a close companion sells Jesus for just a little
wealth.

On this day every year my heart breaks open with the psalmist and Christ as we cry why? Why God have you forsaken him?

Why does he not defend himself?
Even the baffled Pilate does not understand.
Where are you from? He asks.
What is the truth? He inquires

He does not speak and so in silence we look into his eyes and see truth.
We see in those dark, strained loving eyes “I am truth” “I am love beyond all measure”
“I AM” the truth and the love you abandon. I am the truth and love you were created to be. And yet because I am calls us to a love and truth our world does not know the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and dressed him in a purple robe. They mocked him, spit on him and struck his face. And then they set an innocent Jesus on trial.

The decision had already been made for 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 they were, it called for them to be transformed.

And so as the 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. As they take Jesus; and he 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 death confronts me in a way that causes my stomach to churn. For this death stares me straight in the face and says this is what we do with love.
This is what we do with the one who calls us to see all creation, and all people as equal and loved by God. This is what we do when today we choose to oppress, and ridicule, and set apart those who are not worthy of our company. We say they are not worthy of God, or Christ, we say they are not worthy of love, we say they are worthy of condemnation or even death.

It is not God who calls them unworthy. It is not Jesus who says some should not be accepted. He died to prove love.
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.

Good Friday, God’s Friday calls us to grieve injustice; our own, and that of others.
This day reminds us that our God has known the darkest of times in the deepest of ways and God grieves with us.

Perhaps today in this place where the likelihood of us dying for our faith is small we are called to bear witness. To walk the journey like Simon of Cyrene. "Scripture tells us that Simon had come in from the country. He's probably come into Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover festival, like the thousands of other pilgrims. We don't know if he was a follower of Jesus; he simply appears in the story as a face in the crowd. Perhaps he's just drawn to the noise and the tumult, pressing forward to get a better look at what's happening, the way we might slow down at an accident scene today."

But when he is grabbed by a soldier he suddenly becomes more than an observer. He is in it. He is now literally a follower of Jesus, and for a short while he carries the cross of Christ.

"It is true that in our western, largely comfortable, safe and secure world, we are not in danger of dying as we follow Christ. Perhaps that is not what God calls us to. But we know that in the suffering and pain of the world, in the ways God's people continue to suffer under the pain of oppression, of violence, of slavery, that Jesus continues to be crucified. Perhaps our call is to be open, to be aware, and to be willing, like Simon of Cyrene, to be pulled from the crowd; to have the cross thrust upon us, if only for a little while. Though we may not be in danger of dying, following Jesus brings the danger of feeling the sorrow and the pain of a world groaning in birth pangs, or perhaps in death throes. We may not be in danger of dying, 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 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."

Isaiah had written: "By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future?" How could great love, live such death? How does it conquer sin and injustice today? Is this the end? If it is what is the future of love?

We are the future. We now have the opportunity to be the truth and love. We pray for the courage to accompany Jesus today, to bear part of his burdens, in the many ways and places his body continues to be crucified. And 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. Live love so that, that piece of work which Jesus finished in his death we will accomplish in your life.