

Good Friday, 2010

The news is disturbing – suicide bombs in Russia, a 15year old girl who takes her life because she is bullied, continuing violence in many places, crowds who chant, pick up rocks or stones or worse. As someone said this week, ‘it’s pretty much the same every year isn’t it? He died and then it goes away’

Does it really ever go away?

One year the Good Friday sermon dealt with a lynching in the US; another year the crucified one was Matthew Shepherd; some years it is ethnic genocide; other times it is the long line of young military faces .In a recent editorial in the NYTimes, Desmond Tutu speaks out against policies in Uganda which criminalize and demonize gay people. “Hate has no place in the church,” he says. Who is society/culture hanging up these days? Women who don’t dress according to a new culture? Anyone who is different? Who do we want to get rid of?

“Will God forgive us for the inhumanity that makes us bomb and blast and see people as collateral damage? Will God forgive us for the inhumanity that imprisons, kills, or disappears those who don’t fit our point of view?. Will God forgive us for the inhumanity that makes slaves of other cultures to put food and flowers on our tables? Will God forgive the inhumanity that put Jesus on the cross? And will God forgive us when we know what we do?”

We are stripped of our own masks and our social order; our areas of oppression, exploitation, legitimation are exposed. There are the new stations of the cross, our ways of seeing the journey as constant in the world and in us. We are confronted by a cross and asked, compelled to decide if we will hold covenant with this cross which we know invites us to transformation; but not yet....first we must look into the face of death.

Here Jesus’ goodness is revealed and our lack of it is also here.

The empire has had its way – violence has robbed a community of its protest voice, silenced the singer of a new song. This is the way of the world but it is not God’s way. We cannot imagine God or his son Jesus as a lover of violence. What has been called substitutionary atonement, the necessary sacrifice required by God for our sin is part of our thinking this day. Yet John’s gospel has other points to make – a new community emerges from Jesus – one marked by forgiveness, compassion, self offering on behalf of friends. The cross seems to say that love is always the final answer no matter how far we send ourselves into lack of love.

I am thinking of our baptismal promises, and we renew them again tomorrow, but I am also thinking of the love commitments, the promises we hear in the marriage rite, for they are valid for those who have made covenant with God. For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish and forsaking all others, faithful until death. Faithful unto death is what has kept us here this day. It is faith that

will keep us through our own deaths, as we walk toward resurrection. God keeps covenant with us; how will we keep covenant with God? Where is the peace in all of that?

I am reminded of reporters who asked followers of the Dali Lama, “Hasn’t non violence failed as a strategy?”

In 1948 on January 30<sup>th</sup> my generation got a first glimpse of what has now become common. On that evening faith based violence met faith based nonviolence as Ram Godse waited for Gandhi with a gun which held 3 bullets. Gandhi who spent his life in nonviolent resistance to the British Empire was killed by a Hindu fundamentalist, a violent religious extremist who has been followed by many many others in many places. Faith based violence met faith based nonviolence. As it is in Jerusalem today – which do you think has the greatest power? How will our world end – as a violent apocalypse in the name of God or as the climax of civilization’s normalcy? Or will the followers of a nonviolent prince of peace tradition claim another way and move to act, to demand peace for a world that God loves. What in Jesus’ name are we willing to do?

Can we incline ourselves toward one another; serve one another as we did last night? Can we allow ourselves to be tended by others in Jesus’ name, that we might somehow gain a glimpse of what God intends. How do we live what Jesus saw and offered us so clearly; no gift of self goes un-noticed. The foot washing is always an Easter moment for me; the tenderness of meeting those in need of healing is an Easter moment as well.

I carry that tenderness, and that peaceful self offering of service with me into today’s Good Friday; I pray the prayers of others and join those who beg for mercy – Lord have mercy, Christ, have mercy, Lord, have mercy. As we choose to participate in examples of what God’s reign might look like, we enter the darkness of betrayal, misunderstanding, being stripped of all that would keep us safely away from the truth about ourselves and about this world, filled with violence.

Christian people who hope in God must be willing to look at the darkness of our condition, yearning for light, for a place of promise beyond all that we see.

The bad news comes first – our problems with violence are as deep as civilization. Jesus told Pilate that it was a problem of this world and we know from the texts that the rulers of this age – the authorities of Empire – have crucified the king of glory. Not just Jesus but crucified the face of Christ in the body of creation, in rivers, in mountains, oil sands, nickel mines, in children who are hungry, in women who are raped, in men who have sold their souls in soulless work,

The good news of Good Friday is that the violent normalcy of human civilization is not the inevitable destiny of human nature. Civilization is our construct. We can and we must participate in its transformation. We stand again on a threshold of protest as those who are followers of the way; perhaps bearing our own crosses might mean protesting all violence....

(from Jesus, the Son of Man, Kahlil Gibran)

“I was on my way to the fields when I saw Him carrying his cross; and multitudes were following him. Then I too walked beside him. His burden stopped him many a time for his body was exhausted. Then a Roman soldier approached me, saying, ‘come you are strong and firm built; carry the cross of this man,’ When I heard these words my heart swelled within me and I was grateful. And I carried his cross. It was heavy for it was made of poplar soaked through with the rains of winter. And Jesus looked at me. And the sweat of his forehead was running down upon his beard. Again he looked at me and he said, ‘do you too drink this cup? You shall indeed sip its rim with me to the end of time.’ So saying he placed his hand upon my free shoulder. And we walked together towards the hill of the skull. But now I felt not the weight of the cross. I felt only his hand. And it was like the wing of a bird upon my shoulder.

Then we reached the hill top, and there they were to crucify him. And then I felt the weight of the tree. He uttered no word when they drove the nails into his hands and feet, nor made he any sound. And his limbs did not quiver under the hammer. It seemed as if his hands and feet had died and would only live again when bathed in blood. Yet it seemed also as if he sought the nails as the prince would seek the scepter; and that he craved to be raised to the heights. And my heart did not think to pity him for I was too filled with wonder. Now, the man whose cross I carried has become my cross. Should they say to me again, carry the cross of this man, I would carry it till my road ended at the grave. But I would beg him to place his hand upon my shoulder.

This happened many years ago; and still whenever I follow the furrow in the field and in that drowsy moment before sleep, I think always of that beloved man. And I feel his winged hand, here, on my left shoulder. “

Amen+

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