

Good Friday Year A 2011

I remember well the Good Fridays of my growing up in South Alabama as an Episcopalian....Nativity was the only Episcopal Church in town....and there was only one Catholic Church....still true to this day....so most folks in town then didn't know what Good Friday was, or if they did they didn't recognize it in their churches....I remember the Good Fridays so well because that was the day my mother would show up perennially at my classroom at school, and motion to my teacher that I was to leave class and go to church....all the eyes of my classmates fixed on my leaving....and then the questions after I returned....If Jesus was killed...why do y'all call this Friday Good?.... Good question.

I asked my mother why it was so important that I had to leave school in the middle of the day and be subjected to the attention and scrutiny of my friends and classmates....Her first answer was: Well, we're Episcopalians and that's just what we do....well I knew that wouldn't fly in Mrs. Baxter's fourth grade class at Girard Elementary....so I asked again....No, really, why is it so important? And she stopped and thought, and she said.... Because there is no Easter without Good Friday....I still hear her voice saying that....We are told so in the parables as well.... "unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains only one grain...but if it dies it bears much fruit."

I have been told by some old hands at the priesthood, the previous generation as it were, that Good Friday is the day in which the people need a good long sermon....you know, if Jesus can die on the cross then you can at least squirm a little bit for a good forty five minutes....most I've heard were much longer than they were good!...I'm pleased to tell you that I don't subscribe to that school....so today I just want to make a couple of points about this important day in the life of the church....First, I do believe there is no Easter without Good Friday....It, the ritual drama of death and birth, is an archetype of the way life is....that when we suffer(not that suffering is a good thing for the sake of itself) but suffering and death will come certainly; we, all of us, will face that fateful day or days....but the reality that we know in our DNA is that new life always follows....we've known that as a species since time immemorial...One only has to look at the procession of the seasons of the year....or experience the recovery from addiction, or from disease, or experience the light that breaks into depression....the experience of the renewal of relationships....or experience being ostracized and then invited....the making of peace amid unthinkable violence....always in the

midst of death, in whatever form death takes...the promise at the foot of the cross, the reality at the foot of the cross, is that there will be life again.... Wallace Stevens perhaps best summed it up best in his poem *Sunday Morning*... saying.... "Death is the mother of beauty"....So the cross, the crucifixion, is a story, a symbol, a profound mythic (myth not a fanciful story, but a profound truth about who we are and the way the world is)....a profound mythic representation of our own mortality, but a mortality pregnant with the rudiments of life...and second, that God in Christ knows our suffering...that God is in solidarity with our suffering, because God there on the cross cries out with us...God's homage to Job, the sufferer... God will have God's share of the bitterness of life as well....God with us when we bear the cross. I could end here which would be a nice easy ending....and it would be a short homily.

But the cross is much more.... the cross is also a cardinal, *the* cardinal symbol of injustice....power gone wrong....Jesus' crucifixion, the gospel writers quick to point out, that Jesus' crucifixion is the brutal death of an innocent man....And therefore a myth also about the injustice of corrupted power and the violence injustice brings....So we dare not this day grieve for the Christ alone, but for all the crucified of our world....the genocides in Sudan and Rwanda and countless other places over the millennia, and only because of the world's indifference....the repressive and brutal totalitarian regimes that shame and debase their people, only because of the world's indifference....the hungry and thirsty unto death when there is worldwide plenty of both food and water...only because of the world's indifference... the diseased for lack of modern medical care only because of the world's indifference....Hate is not the ally of crucifixion and corrupted power...no, it is indifference that abets evil....so today let us grieve....let us lament the death and abasement of all the innocent....let us grieve and lament the violence that injustice engenders upon millions of God's beloved in this world which God this day strains to call good....let us grieve for all and lament for all this day who cry out from their crosses: "My God my God why have you forsaken me?" And let us bury in the grave the last grain of indifference our souls might harbor. Maybe that's what makes this Friday good....that we lay in the tomb our indifference and fear and wait in hope for the new life that will surely come upon us...surely, we pray.

One last thing....It is common parlance in the wider church, not just Episcopalians, but in Christendom.... It is common parlance to say that on this day: Jesus died for us....that God so loved the world that he ordained the brutal torture and death of his son so that all of us who believe, and believe rightly, might be saved from certain damnation....To that I want to say

hogwash....What kind of God would that be? I want to set the theological record straight this Good Friday....Jesus didn't die for us....Jesus lived for us....Jesus lived that we might live....Jesus modeled a life that exemplified our true humanity, dare we say our God-likeness....our true nature... to live compassionately...to love kindness and mercy....to include those not like us....to practice hospitality....to live without fear, to live with courage yet with thoughtful humility....He called us to live creative lives of service and sacrifice...Jesus lived calling out the injustices of the world, challenging the status quo....He called out for freedom from the powers and principalities that abase and oppress....and that manner of life got him killed....like others before and after him who would dare in the face of corruption and greed, call for a new, a renewed way of life, a mutual and collaborative commonweal promised by our God, envisioned by God's prophets, but prevented by the self interest of the powerful.

So dear people of God....today we grieve, we lament the unjust death of one who dared to live for all of humanity....for one who dared to live in the world as all are meant to live in this world....and today we grieve and lament the deaths of all the crucified alongside him, not just the two, but the millions....and we ask this day for the courage to live, as our brother lived... not in the shadow of his death, but in the truth of his life... his life's work, his life's work, the means of the world's salvation, and our life's work the means as well.... Like the one for whom we grieve this day, we live for the good of the whole....

We gather this day because it is what we Christian folk do....and we do this today because we know that if there is Good Friday, then surely Easter comes...May God empower us as people of faith....people of faith living without fear and with singleness of heart, and our indifference laid in the grave....may God empower us to bear much fruit and to make this glorious Easter so.