

Sunday of the Passion Year C

“In the end is our beginning”

Well there's just not a whole lot to say after hearing Luke's account of the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth, the innocent Galilean, Mary's child, he the one upon whom many had placed their hopes for the future, God's future, the new creation, the world rightly ordered...Luke's narrative here no less is the account of the end of the world...an account of the triumph of evil over good...we were warned early on in this narrative that Satan indeed would return to do battle at an opportune time, and he does and everything turns to darkness...Jesus dead and buried...so let's make sure again that we understand just who this Satan is; we polite Episcopalians don't talk much about Satan, but today we must...Satan, not Mel Gibson's blueish, greenish, grayish man with horns, and snakes coming out of his mouth...Satan is in short for Luke the representation of power gone wrong...worldly power that uses violence as its means to its ends...power that is envious...full of greed, manipulative, deceitful...unjust...power that exists for itself alone...and we see it still today...Satan seeking opportunity.

This passage is a dark reflection on power...It is noteworthy that just before Jesus' arrest, he teaches his disciples about power...using the meal as a metaphor...He says to them would you like to eat and be served, or will you choose my way and be the one who serves...a simple question with profound ramifications...power, for as long as there has been the written word, we as a species have been obsessed with it...Machiavelli in the sixteenth century held power out to be an ultimate good; Thomas Hobbes a century later concurred, that it is power that reorders, power that destroys, power that creates again...power a means to happiness...power, man's rightful virtue...power, that which makes us fully human.

Quite ironically, I think Jesus would agree...but make no mistake here; Jesus is giving us a choice between two types of power: the powers of darkness and the power of light...The powers of darkness, the power of the world, seeks to serve itself...it is self interested...it is pure utility for its own sake...and it will use any means to have its way...this is power that has held its grip upon the world since time immemorial...this is power that defiles and shames the powerless of our world...and it is insatiable...and it is seductive, just ask Peter...and all of us have participated in it...and it brings death...we're seeing it play out in this narrative...we see it play out in the world around us.

But there is another kind of power, older, more ancient than the former...and this is the power of sacrifice....power engendered by empowering the other...living for the good of the whole...the power of serving...the power that comes when we empty ourselves for the other, as Paul so eloquently puts it...this is the power of love against which no manner of dark will stand...this is the power of the life force that will forever find a way in spite of what the dark may do....power sent exponentially as leaven into the world.

As great as the power of evil is in our world, as intractable as it seems, as dark as the world grows...wars and rumors of wars, poverty and disease and climate change and inequality, and racism and violence in our streets...I believe with all my heart that at every single act of sacrifice, no matter how small, or seemingly insignificant...that this vast evil is undone...that God's gracious commonweal begins again....and again...and life begins again out of God's alchemy in the dark....It doesn't add up to be sure...but that's the way of God, the way of truth and beauty...one iota of this, the power of Love, was and is quite enough to birth the stars.

And whom do we serve, with and for whom is this power shared, who is our neighbor, who are they for whom this reign begins?...It is the crucified, good people...the crucified innocent of our world...let us not make the mistake of calling Jesus alone the one crucified....they are among us forever...Jesus one among many...the innocent victims of power gone wrong...the ones who pay the price for the envy and greed and violence in our world...the voiceless ones...the powerless ones....they the Christ, shamed and broken and buried...and who will shout hosanna for them....? This account of the crucifixion is as much about shame as it is about death...shame perhaps worse than a tortured death....because with shame there is no hope, no love... with shame there is only despair.

But know this.....Where there is sacrifice for our brother...where there is sacrifice for our sister...there...right there, is dignity....and dignity, I want to name as the face of salvation;... When all creeds and confessions and all personal piety are said and done....what stands as salvation is dignity...and where there is dignity there is a good life, a life full of promise and hope...a life unfettered by the evil that surely lurks about...We are those life-bearers dear people of God...we the bearers of hope and dignity...We are the ones who must choose each and all the days of our lives to turn toward the good for the world's sake...and the means is loving our neighbor as we love ourselves, bearing dignity to the shunned and shamed ...It is that kind of love that tears the temple veil into...It is that kind of love that will rebuild relationships...It is that kind of love that will give sight to the

blind...that kind of love that will heal the sick...that kind of love that will feed the hungry....that kind of love to give hope to the imprisoned...It is that kind of love that sees to justice....It is that kind of love that will raise the dead....the choice is life, life for our world, a world empowered...and it is always a choice....every day it is a choice....and every day in each act of sacrifice the temple veil is rent and God's love will flow into every dark corner, every forsaken place and into every forsaken soul....and the world begins again....and the end is not the end....but the dawn of a new day.....a new day God has made....hosanna in the highest.