

REFLECTIONS GIVEN AT THE TENEBRAE SERVICE CMCC Easter 2010

LAST SUPPER Reading: Matt 26:20-28

IN GETHSEMANE Reading: Mark 14:32-41a - Kit Ripley

REFLECTION Kit Ripley

Earlier this week, I attended a Passover seder at the home of a Jewish friend. The pesach commemorates God's deliverance of his people from the slavery in Egypt. There was matza and wine. There was a lamb bone, in remembrance of the lamb that was sacrificed so that Israel's oldest sons would be spared a visit from the angel of death. And at one point in the dinner, we ate bitter herbs, dipped in salt water to remind us of the tears and bitter suffering of the slaves in Egypt.

Down through the ages, God has continued to hear the suffering cries of people who are oppressed and enslaved.

In this text, we are reminded of Jesus' own suffering. He knew what it was to suffer. He was about to enter into the most tragic moment of history. And he cries out, "Father, take this cup from me!" The cup of suffering. The cup of death...The sacrifice of the new Passover lamb is imminent. He says to his friends, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow, to the point of death." This text allows us the most honest and intimate glimpse of a man who does not want to face the torture and death he knows awaits him. He asks his three best friends, Peter, James and John, to stay up and keep watch while he prays. He knows the soldiers are on their way. But the disciples simply cannot resist the temptation to sleep. And they close their eyes and dose off.

During the last supper, Jesus had just warned his disciples that he would soon die, but the disciples didn't believe it. He had warned Peter that he would deny Jesus, and Peter vehemently refused, saying, "Even though I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And here, later that same evening, Peter disobeys a direct command from the Lord. He cannot stay wake, and nods off to sleep. Jesus gives him another chance, and wakes him up, warning him to keep watch and pray. "The spirit is willing, but the body is weak." But still, Peter can't do it. How disappointing for Jesus, that at the moment when he most needs his three closest friends, they fail him. What does friendship mean? It means to be fully present with others in their grief and in their joy. But it's not easy!

Sometimes, even with our most beloved friends and family, we are overcome by sinful weakness. I know a man who was engaged to be married. He was head-over-heels in love with his fiancé, and ready to spend the rest of his life with her. Shortly after they were engaged, the woman developed a very serious lung disease, and was suffering. The doctors feared that she might not make it. The man stayed with his fiancé for 8 months, visiting her daily, changing her bedpan, reading to her,

praying with her. But finally, he could not stand to watch his beloved fiancé suffer any more. He called off the wedding and he left her. She died several months later in her mother's arms. It was the greatest regret of this man's life that he did not stay with the woman he loved until the end. What is it in the human spirit that can cause us to either heroically support, or catastrophically fail those we love at their moment of greatest need? "The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

And these tests of the human character do not occur only in moments of crisis. They occur daily, in big and small ways. Every time we have a chance to encourage another person and choose whether to do it or not, it is a test of character. Every time we are tempted to take advantage of a salesperson in the market...Every time a child acts out and tests our patience...Every time we see someone discriminate against another because of their race or gender. These are the moments when our character is tested.

Jesus is calling us to pray with him, "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation." He calls to us every day saying, "...My beloved disciple...my soul is grieved to the point of death. My friends are failing me when I need them most. Fathers are abusing sons. Mothers are betraying daughters. Teachers are abdicating their responsibilities. Political leaders are leading people astray. Law enforcement is fraught with corruption. Little girls are enslaved to factories, and old men are enslaved to drugs. My soul is grieved!! Stay here with me. Watch and pray while we wait for the redemption of the earth."

JESUS ARRESTED

Reading: Mark 14: 41b – 50

REFLECTION

Richard Chilvers

The choices we make shape who we are and who we become. We can choose to please ourselves or choose to please God. In the drama of the garden of Gethsemane, we see the outworkings of a number of choices.

Judas had a choice, right until the end, as to whether he would betray Jesus. But he chose to use the intimacy he had with Jesus to hand him over. Perhaps he felt Jesus, with his message of love, was not the Messiah who would overthrow the Romans. So, because Jesus did not fit with who he wanted him to be, he chose to betray him.

The religious leaders, sending their mob to arrest Jesus, could have challenged Jesus openly in the temple courts rather than in the secrecy of Gethsemane. Their choice was to destroy a man whose teaching challenged their authority.

The disciples had a choice about whether to stand by Jesus. But when Jesus was taken away, everyone deserted him and fled. In Matthew's gospel we read that just a couple of hours earlier Peter and the other disciples had even said they would die rather than disown Jesus. But they all ran.

I think I would have run too. After all, when the going gets tough in my life, I often run to comforts other than God. I choose my comfortable way over Jesus' demands for radical trust and obedience.

In the Garden, Jesus too had choices.

Matthew's gospel tells us that Jesus stopped his disciples fighting for Him by saying: "Do you think I can't call on my Father and He will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?"

Everything around Jesus is turning chaotic and violent, but he is trusting in His Father's will in his life. He has submitted himself to his Father's plan and keeps going with that even when events turn horrifying. Like in the temptation scenes, Jesus chose to give up His divine power so that as a man he could redeem humanity.

Jesus chose to stay. He chose to trust. He chose to obey. He chose to suffer. He chose to die.

As we've heard, Jesus has been praying. Not just praying, but praying hard, perhaps harder than anyone has ever prayed. The answer he receives out of the silence of the heavens is that he needs to trust that out of this chaos, out of this disaster and total misunderstanding of his mission, out of the horror of the night, God is in control.

Perhaps this is how we can make the hard choices that will bring us life and salvation too. Praying. Praying hard that despite what logic, our feelings or comfort suggest, we should obey God with everything we are and everything we've got because He is in control and loves us.

Jesus chose to submit his will to His Father. He chose to surrender himself to sinners so that through his suffering, we could be reconciled to God. He chose to love us. He chose the cross. Hallelujah.

BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

Reading: Mark 14: 53, 55-65

REFLECTION

Ulrika Ernvik

”Are you not going to answer??”

But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer.

You didn’t pay attention to all the lies they said about you.

You didn’t defend yourself, because you had nothing to defend.

When they accused you, for things you hadn’t done, you kept quiet.

Instead of focusing on their lies, you focused on letting them know the **truth** about you:

”Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?”

”I am”

There is such a power in these words: **”I am”**.

The words God used to introduce himself to Moses in the burning bush: **”I am who I am.”**,

That truth made the High Priest **furious**.

The Sanhedrin had focused on lies. They **were not ready** to hear the truth.

In a world of lies, the truth was **too much** for them.

The truth **did not fit into their life frames**.

If this was the truth, the foundation of their lives would shake.

When talking about the Easter Story, my Sunday school children said:

”The High priests were bad ones.” But were they?

They were **eager ones**, eager to keep the law, the structure, the peace.

They were **scared ones**. Scared of the different. Scared of the unknown and un-understandable. Scared of the chaos. Scared of the truth and the unconditional love.

They were **blind ones**, because they didn’t see who you are.

Maybe they didn’t see because they were too high, too self-sufficient, too proud.

I can be very eager. I can be scared. Sometimes I am blind. If I had been one of the high priests, **had I been able to recognize** who you really are? Had I been ready to see and accept the truth?

Am I willing today to accept, respect and love you, because You are who you are?

BEFORE PILATE

Reading: Mark 15:1-20

REFLECTION

Anders Bergstrom

In reflecting upon this passage, I am struck by the silence of Christ. To Pilate's question, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus gives us a direct, yet ambiguous answer: "You say so." But to the accusations of wickedness of the chief priests and leaders of the Jews, Jesus response is silence. He doesn't open his mouth to defend himself. He lets his silence speak for itself.

We are reminded of Isaiah 53, and the Suffering Servant:

"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before it's shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

And a few verses later,

"They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth." Isa 53:7,9

Before Pilate, Jesus makes his final stand, and in every way it is the opposite of what I would do. When I would scream out and protest my innocence, when I would try to bring in every witness that I could in my defence, Jesus instead offers himself, his life, as the only response necessary. When the mob calls for his crucifixion, the King of Kings doesn't as much as correct them.

I am so quick to be defensive. I could not bear the mockery of soldiers. Instead I am most likely to be found among those bearing not silence toward my enemies, but rather sarcasm and an attitude of superiority towards those whom I consider worthy of my disdain. Frighteningly, I am more likely to emulate the soldiers than Christ. In the moment before Jesus is led to his death, he conducts himself in a manner worthy of praise and emulation. Earlier that week, Jesus entered Jerusalem triumphantly, and now the mob was crying for the release of Barabbas the mad man and zealot. It seems like the ultimate travesty of justice.

When I encounter what I see as a travesty of justice, I want to scream, defend, and stir up a mob that will see things done as I see right. How can I consider what this moment means? It is rich in significance. In the atonement of Christ, God's justice is done. It doesn't involve trying to score points against others, or protestations against accusations, but rather a humble spirit and love in action. This is how Christ carries himself into the darkest moments. Humbly, silently, he walks with God, even unto death on the Cross.

THE CRUCIFIXION

Reading: Luke 23: 32-43, John 19:25-27

REFLECTION

Bijoy Koshy

So what do we see when we survey the wondrous cross?

The crucified Jesus hangs there among thieves, soldiers, curious onlookers, friends and family.

Phil 2;5-8 tells us how He got there

He had gone there in obedience to His Father's will.

He had gone there having emptied Himself twice

- Firstly refusing to hang on to who He was – His Divine nature
- And then refusing to hang on to who He had become – His human self

And as He hangs there He begins to speak

- **He speaks forgiveness for the sins of the whole world**
 - For those who in callous indifference to the person they had just nailed to a cross, gamble for his cloak
 - For those who hung around sneering, mocking, insulting and enjoying the spectacle
 - For all who were connected to this event – the soldiers, the onlookers, the passers by, the thief on the cross
- **He speaks specific forgiveness and acceptance to the thief who responds to what he saw on the cross.**
 - What the thief had done or what the nature of his repentance was not as important as a heart that turned to Him
- **He speaks into the anguish and pain of His mother** – an anguish birthed almost entirely from her obedience and willingness to be 'a handmaid of the Lord' and Jesus' own obedience to the Father.

But in Gal 2;20, Paul seems to imply that there is some thing more to all this than simply surveying the Cross. There were enough people at Golgotha on that day who were simply looking. It was actually God's plan that we get on to the cross of Jesus Christ ourselves.

I have been crucified with Christ....says Paul

It is His expectation as he hangs on the cross that the generations of His people who will chose to follow Him will be able to empty themselves of who they are (death to our human natures) and become His children in His likeness.

As He spoke that crucial Friday afternoon, so He continues to speak to the world today – but now through His people. It is His purpose that as they look on the cross, they would also be able to see us crucified with Him and through us understand the reality of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

He lays out in front of the world a no-strings attached forgiveness and He lays that out through us.

He offers specific forgiveness and acceptance to those who respond to that open invitation and He does that through us.

He speaks into our anguish and pain caused us because of our obedience to Him

He speaks into the pain and anguish that our family (parents, children, siblings) and friends experience because of our obedience to Him

Even as he met the emotional, social and physical needs of His mother through the community of His followers, so He seeks to meet the emotional, social, physical and spiritual needs of a world in pain and anguish through the community life of His body – the church.

As we seek to embrace our world through the heart of God, He seeks to embrace the world through us – a community of people who have crucified their self, lives, desires and wills on the cross and now seek to live their lives through Him who loved them and gave Himself up for them.

Love so amazing so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.

When the world looks at the Cross today, do they see us on the cross with Jesus Christ?

THE DEATH OF JESUS

Reading: Mark 15:33-36; Luke 23:44-49

REFLECTION

Allan Morelos

A Reflection on Christ's Death

What does His death mean for us?

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

People think that Christ's greatest pain was the large nails piercing through His hands and feet. Or they assume that His most agonizing suffering was when the Roman soldiers flogged Him till blood gushed out from His back and sides. No, that was not His most horrible pain. The physical pain He felt was really horrible but not the most painful one.

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

This was Christ's greatest suffering. This anguish was His most agonizing cry? Why? The Christ- the Holy Son of God - who never sinned now experienced the Father's rejection. He, who is all holy and pure and without stain, was made sin for us. He who has no sin became the object of God's wrath instead of us.

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

The Son of God of whom the Father is always well-pleased now felt abandoned and forsaken. The Lord Jesus - without spot and without blemish - tasted total separation from the Almighty - separation from the One whose fellowship He treasured the most. Jesus - the Holy One - took all of our punishment we deserve. He took my place on Calvary.

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

This is what the death of Christ is all about. Death means separation. When His spirit was separated from His body, He experienced physical death. But when His spirit was separated from the Father, He experienced spiritual separation from the One who always delighted in Him. He experienced spiritual death - separation from the Father He loved with all his heart. He was separated from God. He died. And He died for us. As it was painful for the Son, so was it the most painful for the Father. When Christ died, God suffered.

When Christ died, He took upon Himself the punishment for all of my secret sins and all the lies and evil in my heart. When Christ shed His blood at the cross, He embraced the wages of our sins. He took the blame. He embraced the just punishment for our sins.

He died for us - not because He had to. He died willingly, freely and lovingly. He died because He wanted to. He died because He loved us so much

that He chose to die for all of our self-serving attitudes and self-centered actions.

On the ninth hour that Friday when the sun stopped shining for the past three hours, Jesus , the Son of Man, called out with a loud voice crying, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When He had said this, He breathed his last - willingly, lovingly and graciously.

The death He died, He died for us. Amazing love! Amazing Saviour - the Lamb of God who takes away your sins and mine and the sins of the whole world. The Lamb of God who loved us and gave Himself up for us.

HIS BURIAL

Reading: John 19: 38-42

REFLECTION

Sue Offner

After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Here is our Lord. Dead. How can He be dead and buried? He said He was the way, the truth, and the life, but the way is no longer clear—we were following Him. We had hoped that He had come to redeem us. And now He's gone.

Why do we have to try to feel this hopeless place—when we already know that the resurrection will happen? Because this will help us understand more of the amazing, earth-shaking meaning of Jesus' resurrection.

We join Joseph in this last kindness of retrieving the body and laying it in a new tomb. We accompany Nicodemus in his gentle, loving act of bringing fragrant spices to wrap Jesus' broken body in.

It is so black now. So dark. He who loved us best is no longer in the world. He gave us hope. He brought us peace. We were able to rest in Him. He knew us through and through, and He loved us so much. He stood with us in our fears. He healed us from our sickness and freed us from the traps that we continually build for ourselves. He gave us a purpose for living; He taught us how to live. We had never known real joy until we met Him. We found that when we obeyed Him, it brought such unexpected blessing. He knew what mattered and never stopped opening our eyes to the truth, to Himself. We loved Him. Now He's dead.

I'm not sure what to do with this hope Jesus gave us. He said he would be with us forever. He said He would save us. He was bringing His kingdom to earth. We started to long for justice, real justice, and real love, in our world, and we knew He could transform the world the way He was transforming us. He said we were His family. Is it true? Can it still be true, if He has died? Can we trust in His Father, when it looks like His Father deserted Him?

We have no one else to go to, because He has the words of eternal life.

How foolish our world is. We can't see what we need most, and after killing Him, we find out how much we need Him. We are lost without Him.

This feels like the end. Jesus' body has been buried. This is the one who healed bodies, who raised people from death to life. But He is dead and it is so dark. The radiant light of the whole world has gone out.

Final reading;

He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; by his wounds we have been healed. From 1 Peter 2

Prayer

Christ was all anguish that I might be all joy

Cast off that I might be brought in

Stripped that I might be clothed

Tormented that I might be comforted

Wounded that I might be healed

Thank you Lord for your tears of sorrow

That have brought me tears of joy. Amen (A Puritan prayer)