

Erin Hensley

Sermon preached at noon on Good Friday, 2009

Good Friday is Good for Us

Yesterday we huddled together to receive the new commandment “to love one another” as Jesus has loved us. We washed each others feet and allowed friends or perhaps strangers to wash our feet. We attempted to stay awake and pray in the garden with Jesus as he prayed, “not my will, but they will” to his Father, his Abba. Today we gather together to see where our cries of “Hosanna!” one minute and “We have no king but the emperor” the next have brought us. We gather to celebrate Good Friday, to ponder the way, the Truth, the life nailed to a tree.

For many, the idea of this day being good is a stumbling block to faith. How on earth can we call today, the day of our commemoration of Jesus Christ’s crucifixion good? How can this day of all days be good? I struggle with this question, too. I imagine at some point we all do. We know through experience that this day is not named good because of any such feeling. Today feels anything but good and our despair is good and right for such an occasion.

This day is good not because we feel good, but because this day is good for us, the whole human family, then and now. Through Christ’s passion, there is atonement; there is a chance for us to have at-one-ment with God in spite of ourselves.

For some, this way is made by Jesus Christ on the cross being the ransom for us. The devil benighted us and God made himself incarnate. When the devil wanted Jesus, he did not know of his divine identity. By killing Jesus, the innocent one, the devil abdicated any right over humanity. Jesus Christ freely gave of himself to secure humanity’s release from the one of who first closed his eyes to God’s goodness. Jesus redeems us so that we might be free to see God’s goodness.

For others, our atonement is accomplished through Jesus reconciling us to God. In this model, we were created with original innocence and intended for immortality. God fixed in us His image and gave reasoning abilities to humans out of all creation. But we fell and gave in to corruptibility. God became human so that humans could be divine, so that we could return to our state of innocence, so that we could turn back to the divine in relationship.

I understand these models of how atonement happens, but we are still left with an important question. Why do we have to go the cross this Good Friday? Since Christ on the cross has once and for all time made a restored relationship with God possible, why gather again and again every year?

Once again, this day is good not because we feel good, but because this day is good for us, the whole human family, then and now. Through our showing up to hear and experience Christ's passion as much as we can, we are more apt to be like Mary and the beloved disciple. We are more likely to show up when the Christ light is being crucified in the here and now.

When we see Jesus on the cross, we can take comfort knowing all of the suffering we could possibly know God incarnate has also experienced. We can take comfort because even when we do not speak a good word for Jesus, he will not take his sacrifice of love away; as he said on the cross, "It is finished." The once and perfect sacrifice for all time has been made.

However, we cannot take comfort in our words, deeds, and indifference that grieve the heart of God. In his bloodied body, we see our worst as humans. We see the one who has lived nothing but peace, the one who ate with sinners like you and me and was executed, as if a criminal. We see the result of our habitually turning to the world's ways. In order to be restored, we cannot just hear the story once. We cannot simply understand how atonement works in theory. We need to live the story again and again and again in order

to live at-one-ment in practice in this parish, in our homes, in this city, in the world.

Without awareness, there is no choice. Without honestly seeing ourselves as the broken people we are, as people who break one another, we cannot see that there is another way, the way of love not fear, of restoration not revenge, of intimacy not isolation. We get to know the way of peace and freedom when our identity in Christ's story is something to which we pay attention. We experience this freedom to love--to follow to Gethsemane, Golgotha, and beyond--when our hearts are alive to Jesus' story, for he is the One who calls us out of our false selves and into our true selves, a people who are known as Christians by their love.

So a Good Friday to you. The Good Friday to you and yours this day. May the cross bring both comfort and challenge. May we face the cross with thanks, humility, and hope.