

# **The Reverend Carlyle Gill**

## **Sermon**

### **Good Friday, March 30, 2018, at Noon**

Many of us watched an extraordinary event last Saturday: The March for Our Lives in Washington and all over the world. To me, it was extraordinary because children gave voice to their suffering – powerfully, articulately, and movingly. An eleven year old African American girl spoke movingly about the numbers of children – girl children who are African American, who have been shot and killed and who remain unnamed. But she wanted to name them, to remember them. That they too were victims of gun violence. Who will ever forget this eleven year old elementary school student speaking to hundreds of thousands in a voice as clear and determined as any I have ever heard.

And who will forget the Marjory Stoneham high school senior who remembered her friends who were shot dead by keeping silence for over six minutes – the time it took to kill them. Can you imagine being a high school senior and doing something like that? Having that command of yourself not to mention command of the hundreds of thousands gathered before her?

We who watched these young people were witnesses to something extraordinary. I believe at the heart of this event was their willingness to give voice to suffering, to their suffering.

This is not easy in our culture. Yes, we all suffer. It is part – a large part – of the human condition. It is not easy being a human being. But many of us are well taught to keep our suffering hidden lest we be viewed as weak. Weakness is un-American. To appear weak is to risk embarrassment and shame.

I was raised in a family where the unspoken code was not to speak of your pain and if you did, never to share it with anyone outside of the family. There was plenty of pain in my family but it was never given voice. As a result, we didn't learn how to be real. I have learned over the years that knowing one's suffering, feeling it and giving voice to it is one of the most important keys to becoming real, to becoming your self and most importantly, to becoming compassionate, to becoming wise.

Those children who spoke on Saturday are light years ahead of where I was at their age. They have suffered from gun violence and much else and have the courage to give voice to their suffering. Their voices tapped into something in our country because I believe that as a country, we have collectively colluded in not knowing our pain, not giving voice to our suffering and therefore lacking compassion for the suffering of others. I believe this denial is at the root of our country's drug problems. Drugs and alcohol and many other addictive behaviors mask suffering but never take it away. I believe the denial of our suffering is also at the root of our love of violence either as entertainment or enactment. Violence masks weakness with false strength.

Giving voice to suffering is at the heart of Good Friday, at the heart of the cross.

The biblical story is not afraid of suffering. It includes grief and lament – giving voice to suffering, to grief. The biblical story is unafraid of complaint – especially against God and to God. The people complained in the wilderness. The prophets complained about injustice. Read Jeremiah chapter 20 sometime. Jeremiah tells God off in very primal terms, in earthy, visceral words AND remains in close relationship with God.

This is good and healthy because it is about a real relationship with God – a full bodied, full blooded real relationship.

Jesus was aware of this tradition of grief and lament. Psalm 22 is a psalm of deep and profound lament. It gives voice to suffering. AND it is a psalm of deep intimacy with God. It begins “MY God, MY God, why have you forsaken me.” The psalmist is in relationship, real relationship with God. This is MY God to the psalmist.

Jesus’ willingness to go to Jerusalem to face the anger, the rage of the occupying government and to face the anger, the rage of his own religious tradition is extraordinary. We know that the story of Jesus’ arrest, trial and crucifixion is the primary narrative of all four gospels. It was the first story remembered and the first written. For good reason. Jesus gave voice, gave his body to suffering. No longer would the injustice of the ruling class be kept silent. No longer would the stifling rule bound religious tradition suck compassion from its people.

On the Cross Jesus gives voice, takes on the suffering of the world – all of it. Its violence, hatred, unnecessary pain, shame, degradation and profound loneliness. On the Cross Jesus takes on, gives voice to your suffering and to mine.

It takes great courage to face into Jerusalem, to face into all of our Jerusalems.

Today is GOOD Friday because we are not alone in our suffering. The love, the generosity of God is made flesh on the cross.

When you come forward – should you choose to do that for the Veneration of the Cross – and touch the cross – think of your own suffering, the suffering of the children who spoke Saturday, the suffering of the world.

The magnificent grace of the Cross - is that it is not a sign of weakness but of great strength, compassion and love: a willingness to give voice to suffering and a willingness to remain loving, open, and vulnerable.

May it be so for you and for me.

AMEN