

If That's How It Is, I Can Live With That

From the series: God In the Mirror Of a Human Face

Text: Psalm 82:3-4; Micah 5:8; Acts 2:44; John 20:21

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Transcription of the spoken sermon

I suppose it may be somewhat the world situation that has caused me to be hounded by two particular thoughts and those I would share with you this morning as the Easter message. I want to speak about my problem with Easter, and then the promise of Easter.

Let me begin with my problem with Easter. We have followed for forty days of the Lenten journey the way of Jesus. We have seen him move ever deeper into the darkness; we have come to that time when we knew events were culminating into a climax that would not be good. We have seen him enter the city, negate the Temple system, find himself under survey by those who would put him to death. We've been with him at that last supper around the table, in the garden with its anguish, the arrest and the execution, and as we have done that, we have celebrated in our ritual form, following the Holy Week events and we have sensed something of the nature of Jesus and the God that Jesus mirrored.

We have known that he was on a collision course because, in a world dominated by power relationships, Jesus pointed to a God of non-violent justice. We could see that it would have to end this way because the power of this world has the power to snuff out the light. We have recognized the darkness of the world and we can identify with a John the Baptist who would say, "God, can't you do something?"

But we've come to see that Jesus saw something far deeper, more profound, that God was not the God of the quick fix, that God was not some God Who would come in with blinding power to damn the wicked and establish the righteous. Rather, with infinite patience, God waits for that inward transformation. Non-violent protest against injustice was the way of Jesus, and we have a sense of that. We've come to this place on Thursday evening and as we've been at the table, we've come here in the darkness and that contemplative mode of Good Friday. It has seeped into our pores; we've begun to see something. This is the way the world is. This cosmic, historical drama of which we are a part is in constant conflict, injustice eliciting violence, eliciting more violence in an ever-deepening

cycle of violence that ends in the kind of chaos that is so much a part of our Easter world today. We begin to feel it; we begin to sense it.

Then barely twenty-four hours later the lights go on, the flowers come in, the bells are rung, the music sounds forth and we shout "Hallelujah!" That's my problem with Easter. It's just too quick; it's too sudden; it's too strident; it's too triumphalistic. In that twenty-four hour period, the darkness is not dissipated. In fact, the darkness hangs heavy upon us, even now 2000 years later.

Oh, I know, this is pageantry. The Christian Year is the symbolic celebration of those events that point to the very real historical happenings, and yet, the way we celebrate them is not the way they happened. But, it's necessitated, I suppose, if we are to remember those things in some kind of liturgical fashion here as a people. So, what we celebrate is what comes to us in the four Gospels. But, the earliest gospel was forty years after the events and the Gospel lesson of this morning was some sixty-five years after the event. By that time, the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection in the tradition is honed to a consistent story. What we have is the finished product, and if we would take it as it's written, one would think that by Easter morning the darkness was scattered and by Easter evening the disciples were glad to see the Lord and we could get on with life. God knows we're anxious to get beyond the darkness. God knows there is something in us that doesn't want to dwell in the darkness, and it is true there's only so much truth that we can bear.

Philip Hallie, to whom I referred last week, in his book, *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed*, wrote about the village of Le Chambon in France, a city of refuge and an oasis of grace, because, in the midst of his researching Holocaust documents, he felt himself so mired in the darkness and evil that he said, "I was coming under the coercion of despair," and that can happen to us. We can lose our perspective and we can lose our joy.

Then, too, I suppose that we're able to make that quick transition from darkness to light, to celebrate with all of the glory of this morning because we have really transformed the message of Jesus. I was going to say we have distorted the message of Jesus, because, you see, if Jesus really was a divine intruder whom God sent dipping into this world to be the sacrifice for our sins offering us forgiveness and life beyond, then the world can reel on its way to hell and all of its darkness and it's not really significant because then what I have done is I have blunted that radical edge, that radicality of Jesus who came to a world of darkness and protested against it non-violently, looking evil in the eye. Then I can say, "Let the world go to hell! I'm saved; I'm saved. Hallelujah!"

But, that's not really what Jesus was about. That's too easy. It's too facile; it's too superstitious; it's too superficial. It is not what he was about. It's so easy. If I can transform what Jesus was really about - the transformation of this world through the inward illumination of persons who come to see the nature of God reflected in

his face, the God of non-violent justice, moving with infinite patience toward a world community marked by justice and mercy, I'm home free.

The God of Psalm 82 calls the lesser gods into counsel and dismisses them because they have failed to effect justice on the earth, with the result that the foundations of the earth are shaken. The God of justice who, in the words of the prophet, calls us to do justly, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God is the God of Jesus. If I can just make Jesus a salvation figure, if I can make Christian faith a salvation cult, if I can think that it's all about *my* salvation and *my* getting to heaven, then I can let the world go to hell and it's a helluva lot easier!

But, that's my problem with Easter, you see, because that is not what Jesus was about, and God is not a God of the quick fix. We saw Jesus facing the inevitable, crying out, "If it be possible ..." dying in godforsakeness, and God was silent because the very God that Jesus reflected was the God Who does not send the thunderbolts that will spring Jesus free in the last moment. The God of Jesus is a God of infinite patience. When we cry out, "Why don't You *do* something?" God says to us, "I'm waiting for *you* to do something!"

That's my problem with Easter. I wanted to stay here in Good Friday for a while. I wanted to absorb the truth that I saw following Jesus in his passion. I wanted to let that truth seep into the pores of my being because that's reality. You don't dissipate the darkness with a snap of a finger.

But, *I've come to see the promise of Easter*, as well. You might say to me, "Haven't you jettisoned precisely that which Easter is about?" and I would say not so, for I have come to see something far more magnificent as I have looked into the face of Jesus and have seen there mirrored the eternal God. I have seen a God Who will never abandon Creation, Who will never let us go and will never finally let the darkness overcome the light. For, think about it for a moment, have you ever felt sorry for Jesus? I don't think so. Jesus was not a tragic figure. You don't feel sorry for him as some pathetic do-gooder, some social reformer.

Much rather, when you see Jesus, are you not fascinated with him? Are you not moved by his passion? Are you not impressed with his strength? Does not your heart cry out to be like him when you see the integrity with which he lived and with which he died? Jesus in all of the strength and wonder of who he was reflected the God who waits for us, the God of non-violent justice, whose purpose is world community marked by justice and compassion and mercy and love.

And when I see Jesus, I see one who is simply magnificent because he was able to live to his death in the strong conviction about the God whom he served who would never quit and never finally let the truth be defeated. You can attempt to execute the truth, you can kill the prophet, you can crucify the prophet, but you

can never finally put the truth to death and you can never finally snuff out the light.

We started out this Lenten season around this same table with John Dominic Crossan here reminding us that where there is bread and wine it represents body and blood and where body and blood are separated, one from the other, it speaks of violent death, execution. And then he suggested that those of us who come to this table to take that bread and that cup, thereby are standing in solidarity with Jesus in the conviction that the truth will never die and the light will never be snuffed out. Execute, crucify, oppress, repress, but finally, because God is God, the light will break forth.

Some of us on Wednesday evening were at the Jewish community Passover Supper, and on Thursday evening I shared a paragraph from a writing about the meaning and significance of Passover and the Seder Supper in the Jewish community. This particular writer says of the Jewish community that we have been "heirs to those who struggled and quested, we are old-timers at disappointment, veterans at sorrow, but always, *always prisoners of hope*." There's an image for us. That's the promise of Easter. If you're following in the way of Jesus, you can be stripped of everything, but you can finally not be defeated. The promise of Easter is that the truth will live and the light will shine and, ultimately, finally, justice will be done and will pour down the mountains as a mighty, rolling stream. We cannot change the whole world, but we can embody in this community that justice, that kindness, that love and that grace. We can stand where we must and go where we must, unflinching, with full integrity, in total commitment, saying, come what may, we stand in solidarity with Jesus who embodied God, whose Body we continue to be. If that's the way it is, I can live with that.

(The Sanctuary Choir chanting The Christ Community Church Credo)

We live together in the awe of worship
in the Presence of the Mystery of God
Whose inclusive grace moves us to embrace all
with unconditional love and gracious acceptance,
irrespective of race, gender, economic status, age or sexual orientation,
loving the world as God loves it,
following the way of Jesus,
sensitive to the winds of the Spirit,
seeking to discern the Word of God in the biblical tradition,
the Movement of God in the context of our culture.
We are an ecumenical community -
in background
in faith perspective
in worship expression;
a blending of all the great Christian traditions.
We find our window to God in the face of Jesus

while affirming the quest and insight of other faiths;
opening ourselves to dialogue and mutual enrichment in our pluralistic world.

We are intentionally a community of open mind and warm heart ...

Where the broken find healing,

the doubting learn to trust,

the anxious find peace,

and the strong are confirmed,

trusting God ...

The God of The Beginning,

The God of The End,

The God with us in The Meantime ...

This in-between time.