

Reflection: Good Friday
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One of the wonderful things about working in this church is that I get to hear Sarah playing the music for the upcoming services. For me that is always lovely but I have to say that during Holy Week it is challenging because just as I am focused on the theological challenges of Palm Sunday or Good Friday, Sarah's already moved ahead to playing the glorious Alleluias of Easter! I mean if music is to be an effective and powerful communicator, like all musicians, she's gotta practice! It's very tempting to jump ahead to celebration of Sunday, tempting to skip right over Holy Week and sing our trumpeted praises to God. But not yet!

Today is Good Friday, and there's a reason why we want to remember Jesus being crucified on the cross. With the readings we just heard, it is difficult to understand how it could possibly be called "good". We call the last reading from John's Gospel, the "Passion Narrative", referring to the humiliating, shameful, denigrating things done to Jesus, and his resulting suffering and death.

As we hear the story, as we consider the pain and suffering of the Son of God, many of us are filled with compassion. Compassion means "to suffer with;" we suffer with Jesus on the cross. And he shares this suffering with us; his pain is our pain; our pain is his pain, too. His woundedness, his suffering and death touches our own suffering and death. As he opened up his arms, opened his hands to be nailed to the cross, he gave his life for this whole world to bring redemption to us. His laying his life down for us was the ultimate act of solidarity with creation. So this night as we consider his passion we have an opportunity to give over our own suffering to him, to be in solidarity with Christ.

Jesus gave up control of his life for us, to be with us in any and every way in which we suffer, in our physical bodies and our hearts and minds. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, German theologian who was martyred during the Second World War said, "only a suffering God can help." I wonder if we can identify with Christ as he identifies with us. A suffering God can have compassion for us that brings about redemptive healing.

I ask if you'd be willing to open your hands, the way we imagined Jesus opening his hands on the cross, just holding them open in your laps for a moment. The very opening of our hands can represent an opening to God's power. Opening our hands can indicate we know we are not in control, and we give our lives to God. Open empty hands can say I have something new within me yet to be born. Open hands can say I yield and open my heart and mind, body and spirit to the one who knows me best, understands my suffering, the one whose love is at the heart of all things.

As followers of Christ, we don't glory in pain and suffering as ends in themselves but we can hold our healing as a process within the heart of God (Leech, *We Preach Christ Crucified*, p.27) Often suffering is the very thing that can open us to the transformative love of God.

How are you suffering tonight? Where do you see suffering in the world? Can you trust that Christ's suffering is enmeshed with yours? And that his love for you will heal you? Can you trust God is in total solidarity with you and that you and the world are and will be redeemed with his precious love? This is Good Friday. Because God is good and God's love has been poured out for you. If you listen carefully, even here in this moment you can hear beautiful strands of Easter hymns in the not so distant future.

Amen.