

Cross Walk 2019 Reflection

Unity

Good Friday is a strange day to contemplate unity, given that this holy day recalls the moment of perhaps the least unity in the story of Jesus. Among his followers, most of the men have disappeared in the confusion of his arrest, Peter's courage has collapsed under the weight of fear, and the women stand silently near the cross, helpless to intervene. For Judea's Roman occupiers, the cross serves as an instrument of political repression and terror, a brutal public relations campaign designed to stifle local resistance to the Empire. And for Israel's religious establishment, it quells a disruption to the time-honored system. For all its violence and alienation, what chance does the cross give to unity?

If Good Friday points us to a truth about ourselves, it's that unity doesn't come naturally to us. Sometimes we are capable of uniformity, which suppresses but does not eliminate difference. Assimilation may gratify those whose values and patterns others are expected to adopt. But uniformity is not unity, not really.

As a function of our brokenness, we do not celebrate diversity, but fear it. And, one of the great tragedies of religion is that it has often served to reinforce our biases.

I recently came across a reflection by author and Episcopal priest Barbara Brown Taylor that speaks powerfully to this problem. Bear with me while I quote at length from *An Altar in the World*: [pp.99-100].

"The God we did not make up" refuses to be confined to our conceptions of God. Rather, God surprises us by becoming known in the least likely of people, in the least likely of circumstances.

For that reason, maybe Good Friday is precisely the occasion to contemplate unity. The God of the cross, that is, God-with-us in even the worst suffering we're capable of inflicting on each other, absorbs in his own person the full force of world's hostility in order that he might "renew a right spirit within us."¹ The Apostle Paul puts it this way: "In Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made [us] into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us."²

Dear friends, our walls do not define us, no matter how high we build them or how fervently we trust in them. Christ has already broken down our barriers and brought us face to face. The question is how clearly we will see God's purpose in proximity to the other, how fully we will acknowledge God's image reflected in her, and how well we will love beyond our limits.

¹ Douglas John Hall, *The Cross in Our Context*, 6.

² Ephesians 2:13-14.