

Good Friday C (3/25/2016)

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Psalm 22

Hebrews 10:16-25

John 18:1-19:42

The cross has a troubling history. Despite the horror of Good Friday, crucifixion is alive and well today. Somehow, violence remains a standard, tearing the fabric of human community and our relationship to the world around us. But, even the story of the crucifixion is not without hope of mending the tear. Even from the cross, Jesus is at work to reconstitute the human family, entrusting us into each other's care. In this way, he lays the foundation for a new community made possible only by his sacrificial love.

The cross has a troubling history. Its origin, which we remember today, was as an instrument of state-sanctioned terrorism. Torture, humiliation, and execution, yes, and terrorism – an appalling spectacle to dissuade would-be agitators from resisting Roman occupation in Israel. Crosses marked the entry into Jerusalem, warning, “This is what becomes of enemies of the state.” But within a few centuries, the cross also became a standard symbol of imperial conquest, painted on soldiers’ shields, and driven into the ground wherever subjugators claimed already-inhabited land for their own nations. And, in our nation’s recent past, the cross, erected and burned, signified popular hatred – a sign to accompany mob killings that strangely resembled the first crucifixions. This parallel was not lost on poet, Countee Cullen, when he penned these lines in 1922:

The South is crucifying Christ again...

Christ’s awful wrong is that he’s dark of hue,

The sin for which no blamelessness atones;
 But lest the sameness of the cross should tire,
 They kill him now with famished tongues of fire,
 And while he burns, good men, and women too,
 Shout, battling for his black and brittle bones.¹

We don't burn crosses much anymore, but if we believe crosses have disappeared, then we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. Despite the horror of Good Friday and other perversions of justice throughout our history, crucifixion is alive and well, and we are implicated in it. We condone crucifixion when we tolerate foreign policy that catches vulnerable people in the crossfire. We condone crucifixion when we rush to make excuses for the shooting deaths of black teenagers. We condone crucifixion when we willfully neglect the interests of the homeless. We condone crucifixion when we stand aside and watch the annihilation of another rainforest. The author of our Hymn of the Day puts it plainly:

Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon thee?
 Alas, my treason, Jesus, hath undone thee.
 'Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied thee; I crucified thee.²

In the wake of yet more terror in Belgium this week, the question creeps in: Can we hope for a world without crucifixion? Somehow, violence remains a standard, tearing the fabric of human community and our relationship to the world around us. But, even the story of the crucifixion is not without hope of mending the tear. Even from the cross, Jesus remakes us for loving

¹ As cited in Kelly Brown Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It? Black Bodies/Christian Souls*, 62.

² Johann Heermann, translated by Robert Bridges, "Ah, Holy Jesus," *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, #349.

relationship:

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.” Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

This is much more than a simple transfer of family responsibility. **Even as his body is broken at our hands, Jesus is at work to reconstitute the human family, entrusting us into each other’s care. In this way, he lays the foundation for a new community made possible only by his sacrificial love. Solidarity is no longer restricted by blood, by race, by nationality, but crosses the boundaries we set for it. And, just as Jesus gives himself for us, by grace we give ourselves for one another.**³

Dear church, this is the work of salvation that Jesus accomplishes on the cross, that though we prefer crucifixion, God does not abandon us to our violence. Instead, God endures it, exposing its futility and making a way for new life, even where we cannot see it.

³ See Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, in *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Vol. 2, 303.