

Good Friday Reflections

Into the Darkness

Apr 6, 2012

John 18:1 – 19:42

John 18:1-14

Jesus knew it was coming.
You don't confront the powers of the day
with challenges to their legitimacy
the way Jesus did
and get away with it.

The garden, the betrayer,
the Roman soldiers, the temple guards, the disciples,
armed and tense,
a courageous step forward,
an impulsive attack,
a loving rebuke,
the arrest,
and the appearance before the religious authorities.

This is the darkness of detention and dread.

I have friends who have served and are serving as prison chaplains.
They deal with the dread of detention every day.
They talk about the despair and depression
prisoners experience.
They talk about the dread that arises
when faced with violence and death.
Prisons and judicial systems are dark places
for those under arrest and convicted.

Sustaining the light of the Gospel in dark places is hard.

Their resilience, and ours,
comes from knowing that Jesus Christ,
the One in whom God came to redeem us,
has been and still is there
with everyone who is in the dark of detention and dread.

John 18:15-38

The disciples, especially Peter, were filled with dread.
Their dreams of messianic triumph were dashed.
They were filled with their dread
and that led Peter into denial –
not just once, but three times.

The fright and the frenzy of the events
made them just want to get away,
go and hide until it all blew over.

Then the cock crew and Peter knew.
His dread had taken him deep into the darkness of denial.
His fear of association with the criminal,
with the One who had challenged the religious and political powers,
had led him to deny his relationship with Jesus,
to turn his back on his friend.

Perhaps he was caught up in his anger
at having been rebuked for defending Jesus in the garden.

Perhaps he was fearful for his own future.

Perhaps he was just confused.

Whatever the complex set of reasons,
he entered the darkness of denial and desertion.

Sustaining the light of the Gospel in dark places is hard.

Peter was dreadfully afraid of where all these events seemed to be leading.
He was disappointed that Jesus was not fighting harder against everything.
He was angry at Jesus' rebuke when he tried to defend him.
Why bother anymore?
Deny and desert.

How often do we deny and desert Jesus Christ
in dark situations that cry for a witness to the light of the Gospel?

More often than I'd like to admit in public.

But Jesus remains with us, ready to forgive and refresh.

John 19:1-30

Then there is the darkness of the death of God.

In ways that are too numerous and complex
to explore this morning,
this is the central scandal and foolishness of Christianity.
People stumble over it.
People reject it.

What kind of God is so weak and powerless
that this kind of darkness would be allowed to happen?
There's nothing here to worship.
It's just a bunch of crazy stories from deluded disciples.
It makes no sense to me.

But those of willing to listen to and for God,
willing to let God be who God will be,
find a different wisdom here.

It is not the wisdom of might and power.
It is not the wisdom of retribution and revenge.
It is not the wisdom of sword and spear,
of guns and landmines and missiles.

It is the wisdom of a God who is with all those who suffer
because of those false wisdoms.
It is the wisdom of love and blessing.
It is the wisdom of care and compassion.

It is a wisdom that accepts darkness of death as a fact of life,
but does not allow that dreaded darkness to define life.
It is a wisdom that faces death constantly accompanied by the light of life.

Sustaining the light of the Gospel in dark places is hard.

We will be mocked, misunderstood, rejected, ignored, and ridiculed.
We will be tempted to make the Gospel appealing and palatable.

This is the day that sets us apart,
this Friday that is seen by Christians as good,
this Friday in which God endured
the deepest of the darkneses of this world – death itself.

But on that original Friday, Jesus final words seem to capture it all –
“It is finished!”

John 19:31-42

Then came the darkness of the tomb,
a place of decay and disintegration.

Jesus is prepared for burial according to Jewish customs
by loving disciples.

He is placed in the tomb,
covered with a fragrant mix of spices and wrapped in linen
to soften the process of decomposition.

Now it was truly finished!

The dread of death had triumphed.

The light of the Gospel was extinguished.

Denial, despair, and a deeper darkness took over.

It was finished indeed!