

Good Friday

John 18:1-19:42

When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me. We know as adults how untrue this statement really is. Words have immense power. We know because words have been used to hurt people for millennia, uttered cruelly and without thought. Words form from our lips and can show how broken our world really is. Holding deep meaning, they convey our hearts and our thoughts. They cause us to feel not only sorrow and pain or joy and happiness, but hope, fear, optimism, or guilt. They have been used for people to support and against people to oppress.

Words matter, especially on this Good Friday. Where, in many churches, services are held which focus on the 7 last words of Jesus. Our culture is in a war with words. What is real. What is fake. Is anything dependable anymore? Can anyone be trusted or counted on? When Jesus speaks and acts, he does so with God's authority. Every word spoken and chosen with intention, proclaimed to reveal God's unending and unlimited love for us.

As we come together as one body in Christ to hear the last moments of Jesus' life, what we hear Jesus say to us as he goes toward the cross and as he hangs from the cross; and how we then respond is central to our faith.

We are receivers and observers to the Passion. Hearing not only Jesus' last words, but the words of each and every character we encounter. Observing, as an insider, knowing what would happen, but also as an outsider, not being physically present to it, not being able to stop it. But we're more than that, we are responders. And it's in our response that our faith moves from passive to active. To engagement with the holy. In naming what makes us uncomfortable. Grappling with what makes us angry. Weeping and lamenting the loss of an innocent life, given up in self-sacrifice.

'It is finished.' His last words before he died. Jesus could have been speaking a myriad of things being finished at this moment. His time on earth with his disciples and family. His chance to show us in the flesh what it means for God to love and heal us. His mode of redemption. His obedience to his mission. The fulfillment of what was prophesied. His life. The stark reality of the last breath in which he inhaled and exhaled. When a life is taken traumatically and violently the hopes and dreams that were to be end with it. It is the end of many things. But, for us, it is the end one thing in particular. And that thing is death. Death is finished for good. His words, just as much as his actions, just as much as he agreed to walk and carry his cross to Golgotha, matter. And

so, we find in those last words, that while they carry with them tremendous and utter heart ache, what they give to us is the opposite- life itself.

The world is always talking. Words fill our days and nights and silence begs to be found. So today, after Jesus' last words, how do we embrace the silence of the tomb? It is uncomfortable. It is full of our deepest grief and sorrow. It is not natural. And yet we are so overwhelmingly full, maybe the stillness and silence can offer us something deeper. Poet Jan Richardson helps us wonder as she writes, "All too quickly the breaking of the bread becomes the breaking of the flesh. All too soon the cup offered at the table becomes the life poured out at the cross. After the rending, after the emptying: an impossible stillness, an aching silence, an incomprehensible hollow for which no word will ever be adequate. And now? How will we meet this silence? What will we do with this ache?"

Just as much as words matter, so does silence. Silence can be just as loud as words, can't it? On this Good Friday, our hearts may not be still. Our minds may not be still. With what we've heard and witnessed, the beating of our hearts through the silence is deafening. What do you hear now, from the tomb, from the silence God speaks out of? Do you feel as the psalmist, who declares, "For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my

fortress; I shall never be shaken. Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God, and steadfast love belongs to you, O Lord."

In the silence of grief, remember those who have come before, remember their words can bring us freedom and life- nurture us. In this piercing silence, recall what Jesus said when he was alive. "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." The power on the cross is more than words. For it's in the rare silence after Jesus' breathes his last that we can hear God speaking loudly to us. From the tomb we hear that God is with us. The power of the cross is that Jesus flipped everything upside down. He defined what love really means. Transformed the ordinary into the holy.

And, as Richardson continues, "He still speaks. That in the depths of his pain and his dying, he does not cease to say what he needs to say. That as he lets go, he leaves us with words of comfort and release, of lamentation and love. Knowing that these are his last words, but not his final ones." Be still and know that I am God. God reveals Godself on the cross, in the tomb, and in the resurrection. But, not yet. That will have to wait. We will have to wait. For now. How will we meet this silence?