

Good Friday 2019

John 18:1-19:42

Come Holy Spirit, give life to my words.

In the name of God, creator, redeemer and giver of life.

Amen.

We gather together today in remembrance of the death of Jesus
of Nazareth, Son of God,

Make no mistake.

Jesus was an insurrectionist, a rebel,
and in the eyes of the Romans,
the leader of an ever growing peasant rebellion in their empire.

Jesus challenged the authorities
with public acts and public debates
condemning their empire.

He railed against the political
and economic powers of the day
that had abandoned those living on the edge of survival.

Those who were subject to unashamed extortion
by means of the taxes that were levied against them
and the excessive costs imposed by the temple elite.

God would have no more
and Jesus came to walk alongside the poor and oppressed.

He became the voice of the voiceless.

He openly chastised the authorities,
and those in power,
on behalf of those whose very lives depended on it.

All of Jesus' actions led him
to the inevitable confrontation with the authorities.

Jesus knew this.

He was not an unwitting pawn
in this clash between those who reigned over earthly things
and the One who is the Creator of all that is, seen and unseen.

Jesus could have walked right on through Jerusalem and kept on
going during that fateful Passover.

He could have turned around at any point in the journey to Jerusalem.

But he didn't.

In the words of Marcus Borg and Dominic Crossan:

All of this was Jesus' passion,
what he was passionate about:
God and the Kingdom of God,
God and God's passion for justice.

Jesus' passion got him killed.

Jesus' passion for the kingdom of God
led to what we know as his passion,
specifically, his suffering and death.

To limit Jesus' passion to his suffering and death
is to ignore the passion that brought him to Jerusalem
on that Passover.

If we simply think of Jesus' passion
as what happened on Good Friday,
we separate his death
from the passion that was the focus of his life.

Jesus was killed because of the sin of the world.

Overwhelming injustice was, and is,
the sin of the world and kills those who vehemently oppose it.

John the Baptizer, Gandhi, Romero, King.

Jesus' passion was all about the kingdom of God.

His passion was justice for the outcasts – the tax collectors.

The voiceless - the women.

The ill, the lame, the blind.

And especially the leper.

The leper left to fend for himself
amongst the wild dogs as the powerful passed him by.

Justice.

His passion for the justice established by God was what killed Jesus.

His dedication to the kingdom of God resulted in his passion: his suffering and death.

God's justice was the one thing that he was willing to risk his life for, and ultimately, to offer it over for the sin of the world.

This past Sunday, Palm Sunday, a young man was resting in our rose garden.

I had a few people who pointed this out to me. I checked on the young man and he was sleeping peacefully for awhile.

When I was leaving, on my way to my car, I went to the rose garden to check on him again.

He was awake and sitting up.

Someone had brought him a couple of tangerines from coffee hour.

His feet were heavily bandaged
and he had on those open toed walking boots,
the kind that people wear when they have foot injuries.

I introduced myself and reached to shake his hand
when I noticed how swollen and injured his hands were.

I stopped just short of grabbing his frost bitten hand.

He has no shelter.

The previous week,
as he slept just beyond these walls
with nothing more than barely leafed out shrubs for his shelter,
a second blizzard came through overnight.

Now many of us joked the next day
about the non-blizzard,
the bomb cyclone that wasn't.

But to this young man, without cover,
without a blanket, tarp,
or sleeping bag to cover himself with
--- it was the worst thing that could have happened.

His feet are so frost bitten that the pain is excruciating as his flesh dies.

He didn't want to come in to sit and have something to eat because he was self-conscious of the smell of his dying flesh.

It's unbearable to walk endlessly
trying to find a place to rest
in a town where the unsheltered are demonized.

His hands are slightly less painful
but nearly unusable to him
for the mundane tasks we take for granted
---- buttoning, zipping, touching.

The sin of the world.

Recently, immigrants from Central America,
trying to make their way to this country
escaping violence and poverty,
were held in a pen under the Paso del Norte International Bridge
in El Paso, Texas.

An area that was enclosed by chain link fencing,
under a bridge,
essentially open to the elements.

Humanity's inhumanity.

The sin of the world.

Jesus died for what he was passionate about.

Ending injustice, hatred, violence, and oppression.

Jesus' gave his life
so that we might know the depth and breadth
of what He was passionate about.

It would seem,
given the circumstances of our world today,
we have forgotten his passion.

But, in the kingdom of God,
it is never too late to stop, turn and begin again.

As we join in the reverence of the cross today,
I pray that each of u, will rededicate ourselves
to Jesus' passion.

That which Jesus was passionate about
and not just pay reverence to Jesus' suffering and death.

It is up to us, here and now,
to rededicate our lives to Jesus' passion: to the kingdom of God.

To overcoming injustice.

To ensuring that we act on behalf of the least, the last, the lonely,
and the leper.

If we truly want to pay reverence to Jesus's passion,
then we must commit our lives to that which Jesus was
passionate about.

Justice.
