

We left last week with two forces converging in Jerusalem during the week of Passover.

Pilate's show of force at the West Gate of the city representing the Kingdom of Caesar- a reign of terror that dominated people politically, economically, through the use of religion. Since Caesar is the son of God whatever Caesar says is God's will. This autocratic repression kept a lid on any kind of movement toward liberation and justice.

At the East Gate Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a baby donkey as the crowd of peasants hope that he will fight and win against Roman rule.

Throughout this week those forces have been on a collision course. To the point of Jesus dying a painful death on the cross.

At this point the disciples are in anguish and in fear. Their hopes have been dashed and they are left confused. Wondering maybe if they had been dupped. Wondering why they have put themselves in harm's way with this peasant Rabbi who died as a political threat to the empire.

This was not the way it was supposed to work out. Jesus was supposed to be the new King David and they would be his political and economic advisors who would help to right the wrongs and bring justice to the kingdom.

Do the forces of power, manipulation, greed, division, fear win in the end? It sure looks like it.

But on the third day in the middle of despair and grief – Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb to anoint Jesus's body. And she finds an empty tomb.

I am not going to entering into a debate on how factual these stories of resurrection are. You can believe whatever you want about them.

Because the importance of this stories lies in their meanings. Today we enter into mystery.

We move from the concrete scientific realms of "seeing is believing" to the mystery of faith. That Jesus, the divine human, has died and Christ, the alpha and omega of Love, has risen.

What does this mean?

What exactly happened with the death of this peasant rabbi over 2,000 years ago?

According to the Apostles' creed, On Holy Saturday Jesus descends into hell. He goes into the depths of terror and pain, forsakenness and evil. He goes into it willingly. Embraces it and holds it in love.

“Death where is your sting? Darkness where is your victory.”

This is the power of the Cross where the beams of hope and horror meet. This is the diamond essence of our faith.

Heaven is found when we descend into the depth of pain and despair and meet the powers of domination with love. A love that is fierce and courageous – a love that embraces it all – the good, the bad, the ugly. A love that invites the fullness of life to have its way with us. A love that does not hide from adversity but engages with it.

This is the counterintuitive move of Jesus. The paradox is clear – if you want to live fully, you have to die.

This is the way of Jesus, “Not my will but yours be done.”

This is the way of eternal love. It is like a water wheel...

God lets go into human form as Jesus,

Jesus lets go into death.

Christ rises and brings forth the Holy Spirit. God’s abiding presence.

The Holy Spirit dances with us as we let go into God.

God’s love is poured out into us. Christ’s love was poured out as his blood was shed on the cross.

This love isn’t trapped by fear or attachment—it is love that is not hoarded but rather poured out and overflowing.

Because the unstoppable love of God has no end, its power is in how it is given away!

Somehow – in God’s realm – Letting Go – consenting to God as all the saints of the church have done – is the healing balm, the salve. This is the pattern of the Salvation for the entire cosmos. And this way of allowing and letting go requires tremendous trust.

Today we declare that love wins. The tomb of suffering and despair, the tomb of death and destruction, the tomb of evil, cannot hold Love. The stone has been rolled away.

Jesus who was crucified by the authorities “has been raised” by God.

In other words, God has said “yes” to Jesus and “no” to the powers who killed him.

The meaning of Easter is not – So glad Jesus died for us – let’s have a party.

Easter has nothing, And I mean nothing to do with the misplaced idea that God is a petty, wrathful judge who is so angry that He offers Jesus as a substitute to take our sins away.

God didn’t kill Jesus – the Roman empire did.

Salvation is not a one-time transactional affair between Jesus and God on our behalf. Christianity can't be simplified into saying the sinner's prayer.

Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner, and I ask for Your forgiveness. I believe You died for my sins and rose from the dead. I turn from my sins and invite You to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow You as my Lord and Savior.

Nowhere in the gospels did Jesus say that he accepted death on the cross for our sins. Rather in every Gospel Jesus invite his disciples to follow him. He invites us to participate with him in his death and his resurrection as a transformational process for the human soul and for all of history.

What Jesus asks of us is not belief in a set of doctrines but obedience to this way of Love.

This entire holy week, Jesus has been preparing us. Telling us what to expect, mentoring us in how to be. And over and over again he says – follow me, follow my way. Abide in my love.

Follow love and you will find your freedom! Follow love and you will discover new life. Follow love as the pathway through the forces of evil and wickedness and you will discover justice.

The truth that you and I may try to avoid, the pain we fear to face, is exactly what points the way toward our freedom from captivating lies that perpetuate our suffering.

He invites us to let go of what holds our love back. He invites us to let go of our fears – whatever they may be for each of us. Invites us to continue the pursuit of God's kingdom coming on earth as it is in heaven.

When you and I embrace Jesus' essential paradox—that to lose is to gain and to die is to live—we come to God, who gathers up the broken pieces of the world and makes them more beautiful than they were before they broke.

It's a life we get to live here and now, by grace and faith. It's the life toward which the cross has always pointed.

It is so easy to be jaded – yeh, yeah yeah...

Jesus this is a different world now – much more complex – global warming, weapons of mass destruction, machine guns killing our children in school, despots and sociopaths leading our governments and corporations.

How can love hold sway?

...One breath at a time – one act of compassion at a time. As humble as that donkey ride into Jerusalem.

So that means that our practices as a community of faithful followers of Jesus is to consent to our own healing.

ACCEPTING our life, our history, our emotions and all the pain we want to run away from – our guilt and our shame that we try to hide from others. Then holding it in love and compassion. Because this is our gate of hell.

And then through the power of that love and that forgiveness we can extend that compassion out into the world through acts of justice.

Jesus shows us that both are necessary to walk his path. And we can't do it alone. We need to be in a supportive community.

This is the rock upon which he tells Peter to build his church – so that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. So that means that our call as a church is to the gates of hell.

On Maundy Thursday of this week – a day that Jesus gave his disciples a new commandment “that you love one another as I have loved you” and then proceeds to demonstrate that love through humbly washing his disciples feet...

The Tennessee state legislature voted to expel two 27-year-old black men – Justin Pearson and Justin Jones – from their ranks for making a non-violent protest on the state legislature floor on behalf of their constituents who want to protect children from gun violence.

Never in the history of that legislature was any member expelled due to “decorum”. This legislature never even expelled its known members of the Klu Klux Klan.

And on this day even though three representatives were a part of the non-violent protest. They voted not to punish the white member of the legislature for doing exactly what the 2 black members did.

I sat in awe as I listened to one of these wise and noble young men talk on the floor of the state legislature before the vote was taken.

Representative Justin Pearson, is a person shaped and formed in the church. And this is what he said,

Dr. King taught us that sometimes there's a consciousness above rule, above what you might say is law – and that the true forms of protest is nonviolent disobedience. ... You who celebrate July 4, 1776, pop fireworks and eat hot dogs. You say, “To protest is wrong because you spoke out of turn, because you've spoken up for people who are marginalized, you spoke up for children who won't ever be able to speak again, you spoke up for parents who don't want to live in fear.

I come from a long line of people who have resisted. I come from a long line of people who have fought injustice. I come from a long line of people who know what it means to face adversity and difficult days, who knows what it means to have words that mean something, that doesn't call peaceful protesters 'insurrectionists.'"

We are in a movement written in love a movement for justice, the movement to end gun violence, the movement to end poverty to ensure that every kid gets a good education, the movement to ensure everyone has access to healthcare.

It is rooted in love, because it is rooted in a belief that every person has value. I know that is countercultural and subversive to some peoples' way of thinking. And that is how we can and the way we must operate.

No matter what happens I am all right, but I want you to know who remain. That each of you have an obligation to stop turning the people's house into your own club. People deserve a voice. The erosion of democracy in the state legislature is what got us here and it is wrong. The people in this state are wanting to see a change. Just because you have power doesn't give you the right to abuse it. So, the question I ask this assembly is how do we need to change and transform to meet the needs of this generation?

Can you hear the witness of the saints in this young man's voice?
Can you see the similar confrontation between the forces of domination and those of humble love?

Justin continued to speak on the steps of the capital after the vote.

My savior, my black Jesus was lynched by the government on Friday, and they thought that all hope had been lost... How is it that we still have hope and faith in democracy in Tennessee? How can we have hope?

We hope because we don't quit- from the bottom of slave ships to cotton fields we do not quit. Now, I don't know how long this Saturday in the state of Tennessee will last, but I've got Good News: Sunday always comes, resurrection always comes. Resurrection is a promise and a prophecy! We are still here and we will never quit.

You see in Holy Love, our sense of separateness dissolves, and we know ourselves as arising from the brilliant light of Divine Love that creates and sustains the universe.

Jesus said to those who trusted him, "You will know the truth and the truth will make you free."

By this young Man's clear-eyed honesty, he claims a holy, ironic wholeness. By facing hard facts of life and death he led people deep into reality, the only place where God eternal can be found.

The kind of love Christ offers is rugged and is as vivid in the midst of pain as it is in the throes of joy. The joy and power of the Easter story is how even the worst of human hate is shown to not measure up to the power of the Love that raised Christ's body from the dead.

The Way of wholeheartedness, peace, justice-seeking resistance, and purpose are the kinds of paths to Love we see modeled in the ministry and teaching of Jesus.

Now, as then, the journey of Jesus is the path of personal transformation that leads to journeying with the risen Christ.

Today as through all of eternity, let us proclaim that Love wins.

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