

North Shore Congregational Church

Located in Fox Point, WI

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Good Friday Reflections and Prayers

John Smith, Lisa Irwin, Rich Ruenzel and Rev. Julie Sheridan-Smith

John 18:12-27

¹² So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. ¹³ First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. ¹⁴ Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people.

¹⁵ Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, ¹⁶ but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. ¹⁷ The woman said to Peter, 'You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?' He said, 'I am not.' ¹⁸ Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing round it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.

¹⁹ Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching.

²⁰ Jesus answered, 'I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. ²¹ Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said.' ²² When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, 'Is that how you answer the high priest?' ²³ Jesus answered, 'If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?' ²⁴ Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

²⁵ Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, 'You are not also one of his disciples, are you?' He denied it and said, 'I am not.' ²⁶ One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, 'Did I not see you in the garden with him?' ²⁷ Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

Reflection--John Smith

As we know earlier in the Gospel of John, Jesus predicts Peter's denial, as was just evidenced in this gospel reading. Three times: To a girl on duty, another, and one of the high priest's servants. Yet, it was not to Jesus' face.

I reflect on a couple of lines from a prayer that I just received this morning:

"And lest I forget Thy face to seek
Remind me oft that I am weak."

Are we not weak, like Peter? Are we not entitled to preserve our livelihood as Peter did? The reality is none of us are perfect. Jesus knew that Peter would fall as he tried to stand on his own strength. But Jesus reminds us why we need to make sure we keep looking into his face, where there is love and forgiveness. In surrendering his life out of love for us, Jesus draws us to his cross and confronts us with what we must surrender to be his followers.

"Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,

And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.
Amen.

“The Heavenly Vision,” by Helen Howarth Lemmel.

Third Reading John 18:38b-19:7

^{38b}After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, ‘I find no case against him.
³⁹But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?’ ⁴⁰They shouted in reply, ‘Not this man, but Barabbas!’ Now Barabbas was a bandit.

¹Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. ²And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. ³They kept coming up to him, saying, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ and striking him on the face. ⁴Pilate went out again and said to them, ‘Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him.’ ⁵So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, ‘Here is the man!’ ⁶When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, ‘Crucify him! Crucify him!’ Pilate said to them, ‘Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him.’ ⁷The Jews answered him, ‘We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.’

Reflection—Lisa Irwin

Jesus was mocked right to his face. He was disregarded as someone who didn't care to fit in and conform to what society and its systems expected of him. He willingly stood before these self-imposed authorities as they made unilateral decisions about this non-conformist, this obstinate teacher, leader, and heretic. They knew nothing about him really; they made broad assumptions. Instead, getting caught up in the frenzy. In the frenzy of what to do with this perceived threat to their system and the tidy order of life they so enjoyed.

Monday night when I was leaving dinner at a downtown restaurant with some friends, we discovered a man standing at the driver side of my car. He was dressed with many layers of clothing and coats; more so than was needed for the weather that night. I greeted him and he me. He explained he was hungry but didn't have any money; I offered him my leftover dinner - he took it willingly saying he was diabetic and hadn't eaten yet that day. I asked what was going on with him. His reply that he had just gotten a job that morning masked the tears welling up in his eyes. Expressing my congratulations to him, he said he didn't have a way to work and that he was worried he'd lose that job he so needed. You see, he was a man currently without a home and was staying at a local shelter. Given the hour, I suggested he may way to the shelter so he would not get locked out and that there were people there that could help coordinate a ride for him in the morning. He seemed unsure of this but I encouraged him to ask, it couldn't hurt. He just stared at me. I smiled. He continued to stare then spoke these words: “You know, no one stops to talk with me, to ask how I'm doing. I'm a human being too.”

My reply was, Yes, yes you are a human being, you are one of God's children and God cares and loves you very much. He thanked me. I asked his name and told him mine and assured him I would be praying for him and bid him good night and we shook hands. As I was walking away, he called out my name and was approached me with his arms out-stretched asking me if he could have a hug. We embraced for a moment, said good-bye, then we each turned and resumed our evening.

How often do we make assumptions about folks we encounter, deciding in advance what they ought to look and be like...?

Have we, like the Pharisees toward Jesus, already cast a sentence onto these people? Do we regard them as intruders to our sensibilities? And mock them, too? They stand on the corners of our cities, interrupting our path to work, school, a daily walk, or to visit friends at the local pub?

I imagine Jesus might have felt the same way amidst his betrayers and soldiers who mocked and tortured him.

John 19:17-30 - The Crucifixion

Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). ¹⁸ There they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle.

¹⁹ Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. ²⁰ Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. ²¹ The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, “Do not write ‘The King of the Jews,’ but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.”

²² Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.”

²³ When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.

²⁴ “Let’s not tear it,” they said to one another. “Let’s decide by lot who will get it.”

This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said,

“They divided my clothes among them
and cast lots for my garment.”^[a]

So this is what the soldiers did.

²⁵ Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, “Woman,^[b] here is your son,” ²⁷ and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

The Death of Jesus

²⁸ Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.” ²⁹ A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips. ³⁰ When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Reflection-Rick Ruenzel

What has happened?

As we prayerfully center our attention on the crucifixion and death of Jesus this day, let us also consider those who stood near his cross...

We can only imagine what they may have felt, witnesses as they were to the great suffering and sacrifice of Jesus on that cross. There had to be shock – bordering on disbelief – and surely immense grief and unfathomable sorrow.

These were among the people that had made their journey with him, from Galilee, through Samaria, and now here, at Golgotha, in his final hour. Shaped and nurtured by God’s divine

will, they had come to know Jesus in a manner informed by deep love - an ascent of the inner spirit, strangely congruent to the physical climb they would make to the holy city during this Passover.

So many thoughts, so many memories, so many “other things” such as John writes at the end of his gospel, “that if every one of them were written down...even the whole world would not have room for the books to be written”.

And now, it is finished, gone, obliterated. Confused and despondent, they face an uncertain future. What, indeed, has happened!

As we consider our own future, what are we to make of this?

A woman I hardly knew – a friend of a friend of my family – shed God’s light on this moment, I believe. In a letter she wrote to my family last year - during our own time of grief – she had this to say,

“They say when the sadness finally begins to subside, what remains is the love. We wish you all the Godspeed as you embark on that journey”.

“What remains is the love”

As Brothers and Sisters in Christ, we know this is far from the end. There will be a new beginning, and a new journey, the transformational dawn of God’s new world.

But today, and tomorrow, let us remain in vigil, in silent contemplation of the cross, and of those who stood at the foot of it, in testament to God’s great love and compassion.

Prayer of Invocation and the Lord’s Prayer—Rev. Julie Sheridan-Smith

Gracious God we gather together on this Good Friday to reflect on the passion of the Christ. We are humbled in the presence of such love and mercy. Yet we admit that You work in ways that confound and confuse us. Your way of Love makes room for even those close to you who turn away and say they do not know you. You disrupt and disturb our expectation of power and turn them into mercy and grace, a kind of power we find hard to understand. We come together today to be disrupted and disturbed and so we ask for you to guide us through the readings and lessons today. Whisper into the discomfort of our silent reflection the truth you would have each of us know. And teach us again to live and pray as you taught your first disciples saying, Our father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory. Amen.

Afternoon Prayer

God who hears our prayers,

Our hearts are shattered by the darkness of the tomb in which we have laid Jesus. We shouted out with joy on Palm Sunday, and shared communion at your table yesterday. But today is a different story. We witnessed the arrest and trial of innocence. We watched Love be treated with brutality and judged by people who do not know truth. The sorrow that we feel lies heavy upon us because it is hard to understand how the words “it is finished” are the source of our hope. Loving God we see your arms spread wide for us and so it is through our sorrow we raise up others to you in prayer.

Where there is brokenness of relationships inspire forgiveness so that healing will renew our hearts.

For those who are in positions of authority over others . . .

Grant them your wisdom and the courage to be people after your own heart.

For those who are suffering in mind and body and spirit...ease their pain.

For those who are mourning a loss . . .for all who sit here at the foot of your cross help us live with the reality that loss bears evidence of love and give us the heart for resurrection hope

For those whose faith is shaken by the way of the world, drawn them in, make you their home

And when we ask like Pilate did on this dreadful day, "What is truth?" Help us to see that even the cross we shudder at today carries hope, for the truth we cannot bear in ourselves is overcome by the one who is Truth.

Hear all of these prayers and those that remain in the quiet of our hearts and send us out to wait upon your will. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,

Amen

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