

Sermon
Good Friday
March 29th, 2024
Church of the Ascension, Ottawa
The Reverend Victoria Scott

On Palm/Passion Sunday, I invited you to feel the rhythm, the movement, of Holy Week. It's a sacred rhythm that pulses through our spiritual lives: a rhythm of death, burial and resurrection. We're invited to feel it intensely this week so that we might remember it in all our weeks.

We felt the rhythm of jubilation on Palm/Passion Sunday: a celebration tinged with underlying tension as Jesus entered Jerusalem. Last night, we gathered as Jesus gathered with his disciples in an upper room to feel the rhythm of love and community in the Eucharist. We felt the pulse of preparation for dying in the washing of feet. We left here last night in darkness with the fear, and betrayal and disappointment of Gethsemane rumbling...

Now today: a day we call Good Friday. We stand at the foot of the cross with Jesus. The rhythm today is one of crisis. We witness Jesus refuse to meet the thrum of violence with violence. As I said on Palm/Passion Sunday, Jesus walked to the rhythm of the power of love, not the pulse of the love of power. Jesus has peace pulsing through his veins, and he walked a path of peace and non-violent resistance. Jesus didn't meet violence with violence. In Jesus, God said "stop" to violence. God said "stop" to revenge. God said "stop" to fear-based reaction and retaliation. What happened with that "stop"? The force of that violence against Jesus crushed him. It nailed him to the cross.

As Christians, we make this journey through Holy Week from this side of the Resurrection. And so, we know that behind the dark wood of the cross, the new fire of the Resurrection lightens the darkness. We feel the desperate rhythm of Jesus's arrest, trial and death knowing that the heartbeat of God forever links suffering and death with life.

This linking does not ask – or permit – us to “gloss over” the events that unfolded as Jesus made his way to Jerusalem and the cross, though. The joy of the

Resurrection would not be so intense were it not for the depths of sorrow and suffering that we relive each Holy Week. As a central symbol in our lives as Christians, the brutality of the cross is acknowledgement that life can be painful. It can stretch us. It can even break us. Today is an opportunity for us to pause in that sorrow and suffering. It is an opportunity to feel the reverberations of this day's emotions and to acknowledge the suffering in our lives, in our world. To acknowledge grief and regret. To acknowledge betrayal. To acknowledge the shadowy parts of ourselves. To allow ourselves to feel loss. To feel absence. We acknowledge our dark emotions, and in that acknowledgement, there is room for our own dying. Our own dying to selfishness. Our own dying to the obstacles that get in the way of what connects us to God and to each other.

I've said before that Jesus makes the shape of the cross in the way that he made his way through his earthly ministry and to Jerusalem: with arms outstretched. Gathering his followers close, saying stay with me. Reaching for those on the margins, the poor, the vulnerable. Richard Rohr has written and spoken a third way, a middle way between attachment and detachment, between fight and flight. This third – middle – way is not about balancing the opposites, but about holding both, standing in the middle. It's about holding the dark side of reality and the pain of the world, neither fighting from a power position or fleeing in denial but holding both until new forms of life and healing emerge.¹

Rohr sees this in the cross: Jesus was willing to hold it all. He is holding the opposites, not balancing them out. He doesn't balance it, he suffers it. He holds it until it transforms him, and we call this resurrection.

As followers of Jesus, we are invited into this third way, this middle way. Good Friday has us acknowledge the dark parts of life. It has us practice facing this darkness. We do this holding; we feel the pulse of pain and suffering knowing that there is another way. There is light in the darkness. There is a way of love, there is a rhythm of love. God showed us, in Jesus, that what looks like death can be transformation.

Part of our service today is Communion from the Reserved Sacrament, bread consecrated at our service last night. I invite you to receive this as an act of solidarity with Jesus. As Jesus is willing to hold it all until it stretches and breaks

¹ Adapted from <https://cac.org/daily-meditations/the-third-way-2016-06-28/>

him, may we also be willing to be stretched, may we be willing to walk a third way, a middle way, attuned to the heartbeat of God and the rhythm of love.

We receive Communion in solidarity with Jesus, and in recognition that we are with each other, in community, in all the rhythms, all the emotions of this life.

In his book “The Universal Christ”, Richard Rohr writes that “Resurrection” is another word for change, but particularly positive change—which we tend to see only in the long run. In the short run, it often just looks like death. We pause, today, in what looks like death, feeling the reverberations of sorrow and suffering, We pause, trusting that this is not the end, knowing that behind the wood of the cross there is a new fire burning, knowing that the heartbeat of God beats in us and in our world, now and forever. In Jesus name. Amen.