

Pastor Roy's Sermon from Good Friday Svc. - April 18, 2014

My first reaction to the reading of the passion of Christ is deep sadness. Why are we be so cruelly violent? What was his crime? Only proclaiming the justice and mercy and love of God for all--regardless of status or reputation. . . In teaching and healing he made enemies. Those who love freely and defend the cause of the forgotten and maligned are never lacking for enemies. Isn't it funny how when someone shines light upon our smallness—our greed or failure to trust--we get mad and take offence because we don't like to see ourselves in the mirror like that? We are usually even convinced we are right, at least until we stop to think about it.

Jesus proclaims that all are spiritually poor. He reminds us that we are strong when we know we are weak. When we confess that we quietly enjoy standing in the crowd, yelling, "Crucify him! Crucify him! And then stealthily disappear into the crowd only to emerge somewhere else looking and feeling quite righteous and safe.

Humility coupled with love and mercy make for true strength and lay the groundwork for peace. But let it be known that when we try to practice this, it forces us into very difficult situations and makes us feel vulnerable, and uncertain, and at times, downright wrong. We walk away not feeling that we have arrived, but that we have opened ourselves to abuse and the loss of privilege. A dangerous place to fragile comfort zones. As with the master and teacher, so with his followers.

Imagine how Jesus felt leading up to and on the cross. "Why HAVE you forsaken me, God? Why?" Maybe I should have spoken differently. Perhaps this is all of my doing, my fault, my error. Did I misunderstand what I heard in prayer? Emphasize the wrong things? Surely he had questions. Surely he was uncertain about the details. He knew his goal to love and serve freely, but the details of how he did this were the challenge before him. I presume the same is true for his suffering and death.

However we view the way his humanity influenced his decisions, we must not diminish his sufferings and their bridge between him and us. He suffered, we suffer. His strength was limited by his humanity, so is ours. Sometimes we simply do not know the best way, the right way, the holy way. At times we are weary of our natural weakness and the stress of service and love. These take their toll.

In this moment of dying, Jesus feels the stress slipping away with his life. His trust must be in his Father who holds life and love, rather than all the things in which we tend to trust.

Forgive them. . . Take care of each other. . . Receive my spirit. God, the rest is in your hands. Lead my friends. Show them the way. Don't let them feel abandoned. His prayer for us. . . As we watch him die. Doing and Being what he wants us to do and be. Not defending our turf, but giving away our lives in love and mercy. Freely we receive, freely we give.

Jesus, from the cross, teaches us that the only safe place, the only place of freedom, is the place of grace and mercy. The place of working toward justice and peace, no matter the cost. Jesus clearly proclaims with his death that the goal of living is not just to stay alive. It is not just to be secure at all cost. It is not to acquire and defend wealth and all kinds of complicated loyalties.

To live faithfully to the call of Christ is to love freely, faithfully, simply, with perfect abandon. May we be so graced to do so with courage. Thanks be to God. Amen.