

## From Parades to Passion

It's been quite a morning!

Beginning with our parade around the parking lot, and ending with the bloody death of our Savior on the cold wood of the cross.

The emotions, if you allow yourself to engage with what is happening today, might just leave you feeling like a human pinball.

And the question that this roller coaster of emotions boils down to is this:

Why?

Crucifixion was Rome's masterstroke of torture and humiliation.

Not only did nails pierce wrists and ankles, but the condemned was stripped naked in a culture where shame was nearly as bad as dying.

Birds pecking at the bleeding skin, passersby heckling and laughing.

To breathe, the victim had to push up with his nailed ankles, causing enormous pain, then collapse again, his whole weight on the nails in his wrists.

Add to all of this the vicious scourging endured before the nailing and I dare say we can none of us imagine the horror that actually occurred.

It is too much.

And so we sit.

And so we ask:

Why must God's own self, the second person of the inseparable Holy Trinity, suffer some of the worst that human brutality can throw at God – in order for God to bring us home?

Or to put it another way, does the crucifixion somehow transform how we come to see and understand and have faith in God?

These are questions that people have struggled with for millennia.

And while there are many compelling answers to these eternal questions, one compelling answer requires us to go all the way back to the garden.

Back to the beginning.

Back when it all fell apart.

When we decided that we were capable of handling the knowledge of good and evil.

It is humanity's original sin.

It infects every human person, because every human person is engaged each and every day in deciding what is good and who is evil.

And every human person needs to be redeemed from that sin.

It is the sin that separates us from God.

The decision to take for ourselves the knowledge of good and evil is the moment we embarked on the road – not of joy and peace and understanding – but of warfare and slavery.

Of child sacrifice and greed.

The tragic consequence of us deciding what is good and who is evil reaches its climax today, as we come face to face with the death of God's own self on the bloody wood of the cross.

When God commands our first parents to stay away from the knowledge of good and evil, he is saying, in so many words, surrender to me, and you will know joy and peace and harmony.

When God commands our first parents to stay away from the knowledge of good and evil, he is saying, in so many words, stay away from judgment, live in the flow of life, and all shall be well.

And so today, in order to take us to that place of joy and peace and harmony, in order to show us how to live without judgment, within the flow of life, God's own self, in the God-man Jesus, surrenders to the very worst that humanity has to offer.

God meets our refusal to surrender with God's own surrender.

A situation so loaded with irony that it practically seeps out onto the floor!

Because, who creates the horror of today?

Only the very best political minds: the big shots of the Roman Empire!

Only the most deeply devout religious minds: the Jewish high priest and his associates!

These are the very best humanity has to offer!

If anyone can tell right from wrong, good from evil, it's them!

Yet, these are the very ones who cause this horror to occur.

The best and the brightest get us to today.

Because, our knowledge of good and evil is so perverted, so twisted, so utterly inept, that we are constantly confusing one with the other.

Whether it's our nation's long colonial oppression in Central and South America, or the institution of chattel slavery and its aftermath of mass incarceration and Jim Crow; whether it is our wars of choice in Vietnam and Iraq that have destroyed so many lives, hopes and dreams; whether it's the illegitimate Russian invasion of Ukraine occurring at this very moment or terrorist bombs killing innocents or our system of capitalist economics that allows the one percent to amass more wealth than all of the rest of the people on the planet combined, one thing is quite obvious.

We stink at identifying what is good and who is evil.

Perhaps it's no wonder that God's own self, in the God-man Jesus, has to die on the bloody wood of the cross in order to redeem us.

Because in order to redeem us, God somehow needs to enter into the very darkest, most frightening, most godforsaken corners of the human experience.

And as humans, we have the capacity to be very dark indeed.

Hitler.

Jeffery Dahmer.

Putin and Trump.

Genocides of Jews and Rwandans and Cambodians.

We so often think of our faith as being all about love and mercy and forgiveness.

But forgiveness, to be real, must be met with accountability.

Justice is the twin sister of Mercy.

And so, on this day, God is among us, yes, to forgive.

But God is among us also to make things right.

Not only will unforgivable sins be forgiven, but the most unforgivable injustices will be made right as well.

The price has to be paid.

Recompense is owed.

Reparations are necessary.

Yet the depth of the injustice that we have created over these many years cannot be satisfied by we who have incurred it.

Those depths, and those debts, can only be satisfied by God.

Which brings us to a topic that is rarely preached from this pulpit; truly a failure on my part.

That topic is "the wrath of God."

We need to understand something about the "wrath" of God.

It's real.

But it's NOT about God being emotionally upset with humanity.

It's not about an angry God just waiting to knock us down.

The "wrath" of God is God's insistence that the good creation be made good once again.

That God will stop at nothing to redeem, to make whole, to complete, each and every human being, restoring in all of us the image and likeness of God.

Even the very worst among us.

Even Hitler.

Even Dahmer.

Yes, even Putin and Trump.

And God creates this new humanity, this new world, not with lightning bolts and AK 47s; but with God's complete and utter surrender to the powers that have held humanity in their grasp for eons.

That's why we move today from shouts of "Hosannah! Here comes our King!" to cries of "My God my God, why have you forsaken me?"

It is surrender that leads us into the ways of truth and peace and glory.

Giving up control of people, places and things — every day — that's the life that leads to salvation.

And it takes the surrender of God's own self, on the bloody wood of the cross, to open a way for us to also surrender.

Jesus shows us the way.

This Jesus,

"who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited,  
but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.  
And being found in human form,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death--  
even death on a cross." Phil. 2:6-8.

On this somber day, may we bow our heads — praying for the mercy we so desperately need.

May we bow our heads — praying for the grace to bestow mercy on those whose lives intersect ours.

May we bow our heads — and rededicate our lives to follow this gentle, yet ferocious, Messiah — from Galilee.

Who paid every price to bring us home.

+amen