



SERMONS THAT WORK

Tuesday in Holy Week

Let Go Into Jesus

[RCL] Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 71:1-14; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; John 12:20-36

Being there for one another in times of trouble is harder than it appears on the surface. We often define a friend as someone who will be there for us when we need them, but what does that really mean?

Our first instinct when something terrible is happening is to turn away, to run and escape, to get out before the terrible thing can suck us in as well. Car accident, cancer diagnosis, job loss, lingering battle with grief—we shy away as if they were contagious.

If we make the decision that we're not going to run away but instead stay with our friend who is suffering, our next instinct is to try and fix it, to say, "No, look, do this, change this, fix this and you'll be fine." It takes a very disciplined and patient sort of love to truly be there for someone in crisis without trying to fix it, an art that many of us sometimes despair of ever mastering.

It is exactly that sort of love that we can often look back and recognize in God's response to our own dark moments. God doesn't abandon us, but neither does God very often step in and fix us or our circumstances. God stands with us with the bravest and strongest love of all, the love that undergoes suffering with us rather than sparing us or Godself.

Holy Week is the test of whether we can summon that sort of love within ourselves for Jesus. The Greek visitors to Jerusalem for the Passover in our Gospel today say something that has the potential to convict us in our relationship with Jesus.

They come to Philip, one of the disciples, and say to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." We have to ask ourselves, is that statement true of us? Do we wish to see Jesus? Do we really wish to see him completely, in his fullness, in his moments of glory and his moments of pain?

Each of us will find one aspect or another of Jesus difficult to want to see. Some of us find ourselves drawn to Jesus most in his times of humanness and trial. We love him most when we see him summon his courage in his moments of human vulnerability. Others find themselves drawn to Jesus in his moments of glory and power. They love the heavenly Christ, the cosmic Word who undergirds creation and subdues

the raging waters and scatters miracles from his fingertips. Jesus is all of these things. He is fully human and fully divine.

We see both sides of his nature in this very Gospel story. You can find which part of Jesus you relate to and which part seems foreign to you by how you react to his words in different parts of this text. When do you love Jesus more? When he says, “Now my soul is troubled”? Then you’re probably in closer relationship to the human side of Jesus. Or do you find yourself thrilling when he says, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified”? Then you’re probably in closer relationship to the divine side of Jesus.

There’s absolutely nothing wrong with finding yourself touched and moved to see Jesus as a man or Christ as God, one more than the other. But it is important for us to reach for understanding and encounter with the opposite side of Jesus, the part we don’t understand and identify with as much. And that is because we want the words of the Greeks in Jerusalem to be true of us. We want to be able to say, “We wish to see Jesus,” Jesus in his fullness, Jesus in his complexity, Jesus as all he came to us to be and do.

What can the parts of Jesus we neglect teach us about the parts of ourselves we neglect? Are we comfortable with our own power? Are we comfortable with our own weakness? Which do we run from when we see them in ourselves? Which do we run from when we see them in each other?

It is a lifelong quest of spiritual growth to step into our fears rather than running away from them, to step into what we perceive as darkness that should be hidden away and find it the very path to resurrection and new life. If we can learn to embrace the wholeness of Jesus, the parts of him that we understand and identify with, and the parts that seem mysterious and foreign, we are one step closer to embracing the sun and the shadow within ourselves and each other. We are one step closer to seeing that humility and glory each have their place and their value.

There is something about approaching this precipice with Jesus during Holy Week, entering these days with him that are literally a life and death situation, that should make us want to abandon all our complex plans for ourselves and our churches and our loved ones. As Jesus’ allies and earthly power are stripped away from him and he bears it with such grace—more than that, he uses the lessening of these extraneous things to drive him to the center of his purpose on Earth—it leads us to repent of our attempts to control people and events around us. It leads us to let ourselves be willingly stripped of the illusion of power and control. We long to be reduced to the simple and heartfelt and honest desire in the Gospel, “I wish to see Jesus.”

For what is Holy Week but Jesus letting go of all control of his life and his power? We know he could have swept away all resistance to his rule, saved himself from trial and execution without breaking a sweat. But he let go. He abandoned himself, not to hopelessness and death, but to hope and faith. He let go and believed that his love for us was worth sacrificing everything, and the love of his Father would call him back to life on the third day.

Can we approach these final days with Jesus that lead us to such a terrifying and painful place with the same faith that he displays? Can we really be there for him with the faithfulness that a true friend shows in time of crisis, the ability to be present through suffering without trying to fix it? Do we really want to see Jesus as he is in all his glory and all his pain?

The answers to those questions will be the answer to a deeper quandary, whether we're ready to submit *ourselves* to death and resurrection, our full selves, the spectrum of our strength and weakness, to the cleansing and purifying fire of Calvary.

Can we let go of our plans, our defenses, our precious control, and go to the Cross with naked honesty, nothing hidden and nothing denied?

It becomes clear that we cannot *force* honesty or courage on ourselves. We cannot force ourselves to be faithful to Jesus or to ourselves or our friends.

We have to follow Jesus' example and let go. Let go into what? Into the one whose every human cell and every divine power was filled with one compelling purpose, to love us. Let go into our beloved Jesus.

Amen.

*This sermon was written by **the Rev. Cn. Whitney Rice** for Tuesday in Holy Week in 2017.*

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