

Good Friday

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

Vicar Sarah Derrick

April 19, 2019

“Remain true to the mystery. Pass on the whole story. Do not go back. I am with you now, and I am waiting for you.”

This is how Alla Bozarth-Campbell’s poem *Passover Remembered* concludes. This ending of a much longer poem, I believe, holds some truth and challenges for us as we journey through the remaining of these Three Days together. And so, if it’s ok with you, I want to use the concluding portion of this poem both tonight and again tomorrow as we sit with Jesus’ death today, and long for what we know to be coming tomorrow night with his resurrection.

“Remain true to the mystery. Pass on the whole story. Do not go back. I am with you now and I am waiting for you.”

Pass on the whole story. It’s the challenge for us this Good Friday. *Pass on the whole story.* The *whole* story of Jesus is a story of God in human flesh.

It is a story of a Jewish man who lived among the poor and vulnerable. It is a story of a man who embodied God’s love for all creation, especially those who were overlooked, neglected, or forgotten. It is a story of how this practice of love and care

for all brought fear into the hearts of people in power. It is a story of political leaders working to silence the movement that followed Jesus.

The whole story of Jesus includes Jesus being sentenced to die on a cross by those who feared what might happen if he was allowed to live. The whole story includes a real and human death. Christ hung on a cross--lifeless.

Sometimes these Three Days might feel a little awkward. We know the *whole story*, we know that today, the day we remember Jesus' death *isn't* the end of the story, and so we might find it easy to jump ahead to the part we know to be coming. We might want to **pass** on the whole story, focusing on only resurrection and new life.

But the movement of the liturgy in these Three Days, as best as it can, keeps us from doing that. Good Friday asks of us that we sit with the reality of death for some time. Not pretending like we don't know what is to come, but instead taking time to remember this important part of Jesus's passion—his death—and to confront the reality of death in our own lives.

Sitting in the presence of death—it helps us pass on the *whole* story of God's action in human lives.

In hospital chaplaincy, you learn the importance of saying plainly, “Your loved one has died”, not “passed on”, not “is no longer with us”. There are psychological reasons for this; people who are in shock might not register the reality of death if you say it any other way.

Yet even for us here, telling the truth about death, calling death what it is—both in Jesus’ story and in our own—it does something.

It recognizes death as a part of the *whole* story. And if it is a part of Jesus’s story, and a part of our story, then we can be assured that death is a part of God’s story, too. Telling the truth about death opens us up to how God might be at work even in places where life has been lost.

That is what we practice this night. We practice passing on the *whole story*. We practice telling the story of Jesus as it was: an act of violence. We practice telling the truth: Jesus was killed. We practice looking upon the cross, the place where Jesus died. We practice not turning away from death, even when it is difficult.

When the whole story of Jesus includes the story of his life *and death*, we pass on a story of a fully human Jesus.

We pass on a story of a God who experiences even the most painful moments of the human experience. We pass on a story that assures us that as we suffer, as our neighbor suffers, as this world suffers, Jesus suffers, too.

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