

GOOD FRIDAY SERMON



Alice Fleming Townley
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Good Friday

For many of us, these are hard days. We are filled with fear for our neighbors, strangers, loved ones and the fragility of our own hearts. The numbers are staggering. My cousin in tells me that someone has died from Covid-19 every 2 seconds in NYC this week. And that her streets in Chicago are silent, pierced only by the sirens of ambulances. Millions have lost jobs and so much they depended on or were counting on. Most of the nation is on 'shelter in place' orders. Many are separated from loved ones in distress. Some are trapped in unsafe situations, struggling with abuse and food insecurity. Those already vulnerable and marginalized bear a heavier burden. And in the midst of this comes Holy days.

Today is Good Friday, when we remember Jesus suffering and death and those who accompanied him in his dying. And during a time when it is unsafe to even gather, in remembering Good Friday we remember we are held in holy embrace. In our grief we are held by the one who grieves.

In Holy days we remember that God became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus' parents wrapped him in bands of cloth, laid him in a manger, and fled as refugees to Egypt. Jesus grew, prayed and healed. Jesus studied, taught and challenged. Jesus saw and named and blessed—especially the marginalized and the vulnerable, and the unnamed. Jesus so identified with—he became thirsty, hungry, and rejected—even unto the cross. And in our brokenness, we gaze at his broken body.

As Catherine of Siena wrote, "As Jesus is crucified and his side opened, we see his inmost heart. We see his humanity united with his divinity and we see and taste unspeakable love."^[1]

And in gazing at Jesus, we look around and notice:
Simon of Cyrene, carrying the cross.
The women who followed, wailing in lamentation.
The criminal, dying next to him, asking to be remembered.
Mary, watching the breaking of her child.
The friend he loved anguishing.

The Centurion declaring Jesus' innocence.
The crowds beating their breasts.
The women lingering and watching at the cross.
Joseph of Arimethea, wrapping Jesus' body in bands of linen cloth and laying him in a tomb.
And the women following still and yearning to anoint his body and not being able.

We see the flow of compassion. Com-passion literally means—to suffer with. They shared compassion and unfathomable love with Jesus and he with them. On Good Friday it is what dwells in the space between them, though it be torn and gaping. It is what abides.^[ii]

In reminiscing over his life, my father recently has talked about the 'Fellowship of Suffering.' I hadn't heard that term before, and it has stayed with me, especially this week.

Yea, though I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of death, I fear no evil, for Thou art with me. (Psalm 23) Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? ⁸If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. (Psalm 139:8-9)

And from the cross Jesus recited Psalm 22—about both feeling alone and companioned by God who had always been faithful. And finally, "Into Your Hands, I commend my spirit."^[iii] The fellowship of the suffering includes God.

In Jesus, we see the heart of God. And at the cross we see the unspeakable love flowing through Jesus and in the communion of those who watched and wept. We enter that flow of compassion as we lean into the suffering of God and one another. And that is what makes are days holy, all of them.

Poet Leanne O'Sullivan's husband developed a brain infection that left him in a coma for weeks. She penned these words, "Leaving Early".

"My Love,

tonight Fionnuala is your nurse.
You'll hear her voice sing-song around the ward

lifting a wing at the shore of your darkness.
I heard that, in another life, she too journeyed
through a storm, a kind of curse, with the ocean
rising darkly around her, fierce with cold,
and no resting place, only the frozen
rocks that tore her feet, the light on her shoulders.

And no cure there but to wait it out.
If, while I'm gone, your fever comes down —
if the small, salt-laden shapes of her song
appear to you as a first glimmer of earth-light,
follow the sweet, hopeful voice of that landing.
She will keep you safe beneath her wing.” **[iv]**

Even though poet Leanne O’Sullivan wrote this for another circumstance, we can relate to being in a place with Covid and other tragedies where there is ‘fever’ and distance and ‘no cure but to wait it out.’ “The poet is entrusting someone she loves to the voice of a nurse who she doesn’t know, but she does know, too, because of this deep, loving and trusting gaze.” This nurse, Fionnuala, has weathered her own storms, and yet sings a soothing balm, shelters with her wing, and leads towards the light. And that’s what so many are doing night and day: nurses and doctors, healthcare and essential workers, parents and teachers, children and grandparents, artists and poets, farmers and laborers, neighbors and strangers. We give thanks for them, and for Simon of Cyrene, and Mary, and the women who followed, and Joseph of Arimethea. And all who lean into ‘the fellowship of suffering.’

This is Good Friday. We too are called to gaze and grieve and rest in Holy Communion. And to do so, abiding in Love that is greater than any death.

[i] 245-246, Catherine of Sienna, *The Dialogue*, as quoted in 28, Heidi Grogan, “Kiln-Fired Hope,” *Weavings*, XXVII:2

[ii] Jan Richardson, “What Abides,” *Circle of Grace*, p. 138.

[iii] [Luke 23:46](#)

[iv] Pdraig O’ Tuama, *Poetry Unbound Podcast*, April 3, 2020, “Leaving Early,” Leanne O’Sullivan, *A Quarter of an Hour*. <https://podcasts.google.com>