



TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

on the Branford Green

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

The Rev. Sharon K. Gracen
Good Friday, 2016

What a sorrowful, shameful day. So much so that we have become skilled at hiding from it, even as we gather to hear the story told over and over. Perhaps it is an inherent problem with words that can never fully capture the essence of such a day but they provide us with insulation from the human darkness of Good Friday. There are two ways in which words do this. They are either perfunctory or poetic, both of which keep this day's horror at a distance.

First the perfunctory...three Gospels, Mark, Luke and John, simply say, "and they crucified him." Matthew can't even do that - it skips over and goes to "and when they had crucified him..." Granted in the time that the Gospels were written, people were much more familiar with the mechanics of crucifixion but it is still a very sparse description of what was done to him and why. There is much more attention paid to the of verbal taunting that accompanied the physical torture as if it were somehow worse. The attempts to degrade and shame this victim of the state seem ludicrous in light of what had already happened to him. Already there was an attempt to put the burden of shame on the Jewish people rather than on a distorted power relationship between Rome and religious authorities wanting to keep their jobs. But blaming someone also serves to protect us from the truths of this day. Should we not rather ask, why did human civilization become so violent and why has it remained that way? That, I feel is the question that we do not want to ask because the fear, fear of lost status or security, lurks barely below the surface of our skin and who wants to look at that?

So rather than face the cruelty and horror and shame, we speak about it in beautiful poetry to lovely tunes with rich harmonies.

O sacred head, sore wounded,
defiled and put to scorn;
O kingly head surrounded
with mocking crown of thorn:
What sorrow mars thy grandeur?
Can death thy bloom deflower?
O countenance whose splendor
the hosts of heaven adore!



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Is there anything more beautiful and stately sounding than such a hymn? It evokes great sadness in us. We four Branford churches vie over which of us will use this hymn. We feel a noble grief and gratitude for this sacrifice, as well we should.

In thy most bitter passion
my heart to share doth cry,
with thee for my salvation
upon the cross to die.
Ah, keep my heart thus moved
to stand thy cross beneath,
to mourn thee, well-beloved,
yet thank thee for thy death.

We spend so much time acknowledging that this horrible death was for us and how amazing that is. But do we stop to own the violence and seek to redeem the weakness that allowed such a thing to happen in the first place. Over the centuries numerous theological theories have sought to answer the question, "why did Jesus die; why did Jesus have to die?"

What if the excruciating pain of that day was meant to turn us away from violence once and for all? Perhaps that is why we rush over what was done to him. He wasn't shot by a firing squad, alive one moment and gone the next. He was tortured and left to die in agony. Why do we not respond to that with a vow that no one should ever suffer like that again? What if we were able to mark that horrible day on the hill outside of Jerusalem as the last time that a group of people decided to use violence against a fellow human being? What if on that day we were truly saved from the darkest impulses of human nature? What happened on that hillside wasn't quick and it wasn't poetic it was just brutality motivated by hatred and fear.

Jesus told us that anything we do to the least among us, we do to him. Good Friday is the illustration of his taking our suffering upon himself. Every violent impulse, directed at someone that Jesus loves, and that would be everyone, is done to him over and over again. So until we learn to embrace the peace and radical love that he brings, this day will continue to be an indictment of all of us, no matter how quickly we rush over it or how beautifully we sing about it.

1100 Main Street, Branford, CT 06405

www.trinitybranford.org

203-488-2681

e-mail rector47@trinitybranford.org