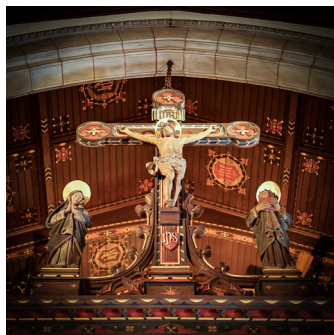


ST. JOHN'S AT DIOCESAN CENTER IGLESIA EPISCOPAL DE SAN JUAN

23 E. Airy Street | Norristown PA 19401 | (610) 272-4092

GOOD FRIDAY

April 5, 2020



NOT OUR HERO

The Rev. Andrew F. Kline

ISAIAH 52:13-53:12 | PSALM 22 | HEBREWS 4:14-16; 5:7-9

JOHN 18:1-19:42

People keep saying, “we are in strange times”. They say these next two weeks will be crucial. That is why I am here alone in this magnificent church this afternoon. We are at the very height of concern for the spread of Coronavirus in our area. You and I, at a distance, are waiting for some test, some vaccine, some great mind and brave heart to ride to the rescue.

It is why, today, at this Good Friday service, the most solemn of the year, I am not even going to read the Passion Gospel according to St. John. How is that even thinkable?! The time that it is, I guess. Sometime today, find a quiet place and read through the 18th and 19th chapters of John.

Strangely, it is very apparent in the silence of this hour, that Jesus is not riding to our rescue. I will get to that shortly. Our business right now is not to indulge in fantasy, but truth, to remember our Lord's death. Bring it to mind the best you can. For my money, the most important verses in John's story can almost slip by. After Jesus has told his followers to put down their swords, their weapons of this world, he asks them a question. "Am I not to drink the cup my Father has given me?" And in what seems like a transition to the next scene, from the garden of betrayal to the humiliation of his trial, we overhear Caiaphas, the high Priest, advising the leaders of the Jews: "it would be better than one man die for the people."

This is not just power speaking, but cunning and worldly wisdom. Caiaphas has a plan based on how things get done. Don't worry Israel, we've got this contagious rebel Jesus under control, we're doing beautifully. The people will need somebody to blame. They will want a scapegoat. Let's give them what they want. And we will be the heroes. We will get to keep it all, the kingdom, the power and the glory.

This is the system at work. This is the play acting of this world that needs heroes and villains, bread and circuses, buying and selling, trade offs, show trials and executions – reality TV! – to keep us all entertained. The cup that Jesus will drink will reveal not only how much we senselessly suffer all of this, how especially the poor and the marginalized are forgotten and exploited in this, but finally, how and why we just don't have to anymore live under its threat and rule.

We Christians often think and refer to Jesus as our hero. That is, in the same way we Christians, without too much

thought and far too easily for our non-Christian friends, think of Jesus as our friend, as our good luck charm, as our ally in the political struggle.

But Jesus is more than just our hero. Certainly, today we remember how he fought the good fight, how he valiantly waged battle against the forces of evil, and feel in our gut, that, somehow, he was not defeated. Still we are human. We love to honor him like a fallen general. We sing songs that say there will never be another like him.

Friends. Let's go deeper. We must wrestle with how unheroic Jesus' actions are. He does not ride to our rescue. He does not reveal any magic powers or skills that can actually defeat the forces of wickedness. There is no ultimate determination or perseverance that will get him through.

Judas, or Peter, or Caiaphas, or Pilate or you or me, might as well have just pulled out our gun, shot him dead in the street, and walked away. There is no sword or equation that he reveals by sleight of hand, that changes the grim oppression of the masses and the brutal quest for domination by the rich and the self righteous, be they religious, political or familial agents of the ruling powers of this world.

Jesus is more than our hero. So much more. He is the Son of the living God, the very Word of God that sustains the universe, who has a task to accomplish. And that job is to turn the hero narrative on its head, to upend the normal human ways we seek to justify ourselves and live with all our crimes and misdemeanors. Jesus is the one who drinks the cup that no one else can drink.

Jesus disarms and unmask the powers and principalities by knowing that they cannot ultimately hurt or disfigure him, or any of us. In his great passion, in his great suffering, he then transfers that knowledge to us. That is, in our baptism, when we die and rise with Jesus, and by God's grace live a Jesus shaped life, we slowly but surely come to die to ourselves and live to God, and therefore, live a life for others.

Last Sunday I share the story of an 80 year old man who decided that he had fought the good fight, his wife had just died of COVID-19 weeks before. Now he was sick with it, on a respirator, in a hospital in Detroit that needed more respirators than they had. He decided he would give his ventilator to a much younger man who needed it that day, and died in peace. A hero indeed. Thankfully, these days, we are hearing many such stories. And they touch us each in different ways. Each story searching for a deeper sense, a deeper meaning, the feeling that there is hope! There is faith! There is a lasting love! This one seems so appropriate for today, with its theological echoes of Christlike sacrifice, substitution and atonement.

Still, we need more than heroes. We need the thing that gives birth to this kind of courage. We need that to stand on.

Jesus does not ride to our rescue. He is our rescue. He drinks the cup. In and through his faithfulness, he invites us into the most difficult places of suffering and trial that we can know. So that we can be there with him, able to bear whatever burden, to seek whatever forgiveness, to make whatever sacrifice, as a gift that bears life within it. We can do it because we see that he has drunk the cup.

In the way he loves everyone as he goes through his passion, we see that he holds the knowledge of what comes next, of how to make sense of our offerings and sacrifices

The secret is to put hero worship aside. And find a relationship that is salvation itself. Jesus holds the knowledge of what comes. And that knowledge is his none other than his love. For you. For me. For all.

And the knowledge, that knowledge, that comes in his death, will become the seed of a faithful way to live. He has drunk the cup his Father prepared for him. In him, in the cross shaped life that each of us are to lead, there is a cup prepared for us, a joyful sacrifice that we are to make each day. To live no longer for ourselves, but for him who died for us. And who, rumor has it, is even now coming into the world, anew, afresh.

Jesus holds the knowledge of what comes next. Just wait for it. Just wait for it.

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