

Good Friday, Year C
The Reverend D. S. Mote, PhD
St Paul's Episcopal Church, Key West, FL
April 15, 2022
Isaiah 50:4-9a
Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 or Psalm 31:9-16
Philippians 2:5-11
John 18:1-19:42

Death Matters

Two years ago on Good Friday, I was in a cemetery. Two years ago on Good Friday, we buried our beloved cousin Lucile, age 97, one of the beloved matriarchs of our extended family. Lucile was the first person in her assisted living facility to die from COVID-19.

It was April, 2020. For the first time ever I had to ask my bishop for permission to perform a funeral because of the COVID protocols in place. I wrote to him and assured him that I would abide by all the indicated conventions. There would be only ten of us, including the funeral director, present. We would keep the service short. Everything would be done outdoors. Everyone would be masked.

We gathered there, ten of us. We cried. We refrained from embracing. We remembered her together. We gave thanks for her life. We commended her soul to God, and we committed her earthly remains to the ground. Afterward, we refrained from embracing. We said goodbye and went our separate ways.

Afterward, I reported to my bishop that the service was concluded; everything had been followed decently and in good order. He asked, "How are you?" I said, "Bishop, it seems that nothing says Good Friday quite like a small group of people who dearly love someone who has died gathering at a grave, laying a body to rest; a small group while dozens and dozens of others stay away because of love or fear or both.

This is Good Friday. It is fear, and it is love. It is both, for in this day everything comes together. And everyone comes together and collides and then separates and collides again and separates again, and the drama continues. And we walk with our Savior Jesus Christ *through* his passion, *to* his death, and we wait.

And we come today not to express our shame and humiliation nor to glory in his but rather to remember that, by the amazing love and grace of our God, the cross—

an instrument of death—has been transformed for us who follow Jesus into none other than the way of life and peace.

The cross holds everything together in its horizontal and vertical beams. At the center, at the point of greatest tension, everything comes together. And in God and in God's Christ it holds together. And it holds us together as individuals and as fellow followers of our Savior.

Good Friday is all of it. And we are somber because we realize the enormity of the sacrifice. We realize what it costs to live one's life following one's indicated path in the face of great adversity. And we give thanks for the persistence of Jesus the Christ. And we remember he was, he is fully human and fully divine so that in his death, death has been taken into God's own self and has been transformed into life again.

We sorrow when people we love die even as we know that death is not the end but the next phase and in many ways the beginning of what is yet to come. But we do sorrow when people we love die. The epistle writer says we grieve but not as those who have no hope. And so, here we are today/tonight. And we pause to mark this day of enormous sacrifice, to contemplate what great love has been shown toward us, what great deeds have been done on our behalf. And we observe quiet and stillness. We pray solemn prayers. We prepare ourselves for what is next. But we give death its due. It is a part of this life. And only because of this death can we become truly people of the Resurrection.

We know the rest of the story. Those who gathered at the foot of the cross, those who ran away to hide, those who in great love buried the body of our Savior acted in love, but they did not know the rest of the story. So we remember their grief, their loss, their sense of chaos, and that their world had come to a screeching halt. We pause and remember all those in this moment around this globe whose lives in various ways have come to a screeching halt. We lift up all the peoples and all the nations of the world. We remember all those who have died, including all those in these past two years who have died of COVID-19. We memorialize these deaths. We say they matter. And we do so in the spirit of our Savior as we on this day remember his death and say it matters.