

Sermon – Good Friday – 3/21/08 St. Matthew's Episcopal Church

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus, who is the Christ.

I would like to begin this meditation for Good Friday with the words of the opening chorus of J. S. Bach's great musical meditation on the Passion according to St. Matthew.:

Come, daughters, help me mourn! Look! – At whom? – The Bridegroom.

Look at him! – In what guise? – Like a lamb. Look! – At what? – Look at His patience.

*Look! – Where? – At our guilt. Look at Him, out of love and grace,
carrying the wood for His own cross.*

Look! See! Behold!

See with your eyes! See with your minds! See and understand!

Seeing is one of the central themes of the Gospels, but nowhere is it more central to the story that during the Passion account:

- Jesus enters into Jerusalem, not in splendor and glory like a king or a general; but humbly riding on a donkey.
- Jesus celebrates the Passover with His disciples – but he changes it profoundly: Look – Eat – This is my body; Look – drink – this is my blood!
- Jesus prays in agony in Gethsemane – not to ponder his next move, to plan resistance or plan strategy – but in humble submission – *Not what I will, but what you will* he says.
- Jesus accepts and meets his arrest with acceptance and grace and even compassion – healing the ear of the high priest's servant!
- Jesus continues His humble submission through the trial – the scourging – the humiliation of the crucifixion.

Look! See! THIS is the Messiah! THIS is the Christ! This is God's way of saving His people! How can this be we ask with the disciples. This is not what we expect, this is not reasonable – to redeem all humanity through death on a cross; to defeat the powers of death and hate and sin and evil through humble submission and death.

This doesn't make sense – the disciples certainly don't think so anyway:

- Judas conspires to betray Jesus because Jesus is not living up to expectations of what a Messiah is supposed to be and do. Some commentators suggest he might have expected that by turning Jesus over he would actually force Jesus' hand. It doesn't work out that way.
- At the Last Supper the disciples are confused and clueless and this continues as they accompany Jesus to the Garden of Gethsemane. While Jesus prays in agony, the disciples sleep an ignorant sleep.
- When the arrest comes Peter tries clumsily to resist, earning yet another rebuke from Jesus.
- Peter goes on, despite his bravado, to deny his association with Jesus – not one, not twice – but three times – in order to save his own neck.

The disciples do not see or understand that God's love for His creation – for US – is so deep, so amazing and so full and intense that God himself, incarnate in Jesus, chooses to die in agony for us, His creation. God has determined that this amazing gift of giving Himself is the only way to save us from our Sin – from our inward turning, our putting ourselves above all else

and our trying to replace God with our own agendas. The only way we can be saved from destroying ourselves is for God, Himself, to take the entire consequence of our Sin upon Himself and to die upon the cross. This He does for us out of love! What wondrous love is this!

No strings attached love is hard for us to accept. There is a catch to everything right? That is what the disciple's believed and what many of us believe as well. The "enforcer" view of God is so much easier to understand: God has rules, if we break the rules we have to suffer the consequences. And it follows then that we need to earn our way into God's Kingdom and that the bad things that happen are God's just punishment for our breaking the rules.

NO – NO – NO! This is a theology of blindness and is a denial of the Gospel.

No – Look! Where! There – on the cross! There we see that we are made one with God through God's love and grace – alone!

Look! Where! There – on the cross! Jesus is holding His arms open for us – waiting to embrace and receive us in Love! Waiting and ready to empower us in His amazing, wondrous love!

Finally, Jesus closes His eyes in death on the cross and once we have caught a glimpse of the cross, what is left? Christ invites us to close our eyes, in trust and faith and accept this wondrous gift of love.

I would like to finish with words which come from the closing chorus from the Bach St. Matthew passion:

Now the Lord has been lain to rest. My Jesus, my Jesus, good night!

The suffering caused Him by our Sin is finished. My Jesus, good night!...

A thousand thanks be given lifelong for your passion,

that you prized my soul's good so dearly. My Jesus, my Jesus good night.

We sit down in tears and call to you – rest softly, softly rest! Rest well!

You grave and tombstone shall be to a troubled conscience a comfortable pillow,

And for a troubled soul a resting place.

In highest contentment, my eyes close there in slumber.

In the names of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit+

The Rev. S. Blake Duncan