



Do Not Look Away



A Sermon By
Ms. Jean Cotting

April 19, 2019
Good Friday
Grace Episcopal Church
Silver Spring, Maryland

*An audio version of this sermon may be found on the Grace Church website at
<http://graceepiscopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/2019-04-19-JC.mp3>.*

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Matthew 10: 32-42

Today is very difficult day. The urge is to look away. It is a day that some Christians avoid church altogether. It is very easy to get caught in the graphic violence and brutality of the passion narrative. Jesus wasn't simply executed and put to death – first he was badly beaten, tormented, ridiculed, and tortured. His friends abandoned him and in his final moments dying an excruciating death, he may have felt that even his Father has abandoned him. For me the hardest thing to grapple with about this day is “Why?” Forget the Sunday school explanations that Christ died for our sins. The unanswerable question I come back to time and again is “Why did it have to happen like this?” Why did he have to go through all this pain, suffering, and humiliation? If God is really all powerful, couldn't God have figured out some other way to fix this whole mess? Couldn't an all powerful God just forgive our sins and reconcile us through some other means? So again, I ask - Why?

Over the last couple years, I've read volumes and volumes on this very topic. I can regurgitate the theories of others – but I have yet to have any sort of deep in bones conviction that gives me a satisfying answer to the question of “Why this? Why the crucifixion?”

I am not sure and I am no theologian, but I think part of the answer may lie in the psalm that we have just read. So much of what the author of the psalm says seems to call to mind the same sense of desperation that Jesus must have experienced in his final moments on the cross. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.”

“...scorned by all and despised by the people.”

“All who see me laugh me to scorn; they curl their lips and wag their heads”

The authors of the today's/tonight's gospel make the point that events of the crucifixion trace back to this very psalm, “They stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them; they cast lots for my clothing.”

I believe, though, that this psalm is less about predicting specific details and more about underscoring Jesus suffering from the absolute worst of human depravity. Bible scholars don't know who composed the psalm or even from whose perspective it was written. Some hold that it was King David in one of the many trials and tribulations that he faced. Some believe it could have been Queen Esther in her moments of despair and fear when she and her people were in mortal peril. In fact, in the Jewish tradition this psalm is read for Purim which is the feast in which they commemorate Queen Esther saving the Jewish people from annihilation.

I think the common thread that runs through both possibilities is the experience of incredible fear, dread, and a sense that all is lost, coupled in that strange paradox in which the forsaken faithful person calls out in remembrance of God's faithfulness, of what God has done in the past, and what God will do again.

Because I think maybe the crucifixion was not done to placate something in God, but maybe the crucifixion was to placate something in us. I think it's an event that although we have the urge to look away – we can't. I think maybe sometimes we humans look at ourselves or look at the world around us and in our forsakenness we block God because we cannot imagine how God can forgive us, how God can restore us, how God can ever make the hopelessness of a situation right again. And so for me, I believe that part of what the crucifixion means is Jesus saying to us, “Yes...Yes, I will. There is no limit to my love for you. There is no pain, no horror and degradation, not even death itself that I will not go through to rescue you. I have already trod this exact same path myself and felt the pain you feel. I am with you through every moment of your life, the good, the bad, the horror filled, every step of the way I am with you, and I will pull you through to the other side.

So when we are confronted with the suffering and violence of the cross, we must not look away because we would much rather avert our eyes from the cruciform figure before us.

Because we do not want to think about the frenzied crowd shouting, “Crucify him! Crucify him! Crucify him!” that led to this end.

Because we do not want to ponder the last glimmers of his life ebbing from the broken and battered body, the blood oozing from temple, staining a thorny crown.

Because we want to stop our fingers tight in our ears to drown out a mother’s wail, or a cock crow in the distance.

Because it all seems so utterly pointless and senseless.

But do not look away.

Because what you see is abundant life through a glass darkly.

Because the blood poured out and the water flowing from the Temple, is all love. Nothing but love – pure, divine, radiant, splendid. More beautiful and abundant than mind can take in or tongue can describe.

The gift of Son freely given, returning to the Father and taking all of us with him as he goes - the lost sheep, the wailing women, the hateful crowd, even the Pharisee.

As the Temple curtain is torn asunder,

Do not look away. Amen.