

Good Friday 2020

We Christians have an incredible sign in the crucifix. Incredible – as in “not to be believed.” We are so used to it, that perhaps we don’t really see it. But we prominently display in our churches, in our homes, sometimes on our persons, a man nailed to a cross – and proclaim it as a sign of victory. An instrument of torture used by those in power to dehumanize and execute an innocent person – we hold up as our “standard” – the preeminent symbol of the one we call the Christ, the Son of God.

Just at face value, it’s all a little off, this crucifixion. There was no miracle in the end. No angel came to rescue Jesus. Where, in the crucifixion, is God? What *sense* was there, is there, to it all?

Paul writes to the Corinthians: “The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God....

“For Jews demand signs [those miracle things – or a connection to the Hebrew scriptures] and Greeks desire wisdom [where is the sense or logic of it all?], but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.”

It did not take long for believers to try to answer the objections of non-believers, to try to make sense of this crucified Lord to people. Jews understood the concept of a scapegoat, after all, from the provision in Leviticus that the priest should lay the sins of the people on a poor goat and cast it out into the desert. So Jesus’ crucifixion could be explained as the one who took on the sins of the world...which became the one who *atoned* for the sins of the world... And the philosophers could make sense of the notion that there was a debt to be paid, justice to be satisfied. Theology volumes have been filled with discourse trying to remove the stumbling block and the foolishness that is Christ crucified.

And today, as we face this awful pandemic, we are still at it – trying to make sense of this suffering. There are those proclaiming that the virus is God’s punishment for our sinfulness. Some are indeed scapegoating others – calling it the Chinese virus, as if somehow all Asians should be suspect. Some want to jump right to Easter – to the resurrection – to go “back to normal” – as if that could be done by wishing it so.

The truth is, in this moment, we are called to be present to the suffering, to sit before the cross and acknowledge that the crucifixion leaves us bereft, the pain of all those – known and unknown – who are dying from this virus, cut off from their loved ones, leaves us bereft. We cannot explain it away as something God is doing to us, or as something that is someone’s fault. We can only sit – with the cross and the virus – and hold on to our certainty, deep down within us, that God is present with us in the suffering. Jesus hangs on the cross, not as an atonement to *God*, but as God’s proclamation to *us* that God is present, even in the suffering.

So for today – let us sit with the pain, the emptiness, the grief – all that we’ve tried to explain away – and rest in the awareness of God present in the cross, in those suffering around us, in our own suffering. Let us just really be there today.