

Good Friday

April 15, 2022

Faith, Okemos

Isaiah 52:13-53:12, Hebrews 10:16-25, John 18:1-19:42

The Family for Which Jesus Died

O sacred head, what glory, what bliss till now was thine! Yet, though despised and gory, I joy to call thee mine.

Many of you know Heidi Magyar and some of you her mother, Mabel Anglin. Heidi was our children's beloved and favorite baby sitter when we lived in Imlay City. I was pastor of St. Paul, where Heidi and her mom were members and where I was privileged to preside at the marriage of Tim and Heidi. As I first wrote this, Tim's mom, Marion, was very near death, surrounded by her family. Yesterday, on Maundy Thursday, Marion died.

Her family prayed together these words:

With Mary the mother of Jesus, and the women who watched at the cross; God of the promise, we put our trust in you. With our Lord Jesus, who commended himself into your hands when he breathed his last; God of the promise, we put our trust in you. With Marion, whom we now place into your strong arms, confident of your grace and mercy, God of the promise, we put our trust in you.

I think of her family in the context of God's whole family for whom we prayed in our service tonight:

Almighty God, look with loving mercy on your family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed, to be given over to the hands of sinners, and to suffer death on the cross; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever.

I think of this family called Faith Lutheran Church, a family of sinners assured of forgiveness to whom these words from the letter to the Hebrews were read tonight:

This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds...I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.

So much grace! So much love!

As we listened to the passion story according to John, we heard Jesus say to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.” And to the disciple standing beside her whom he loved, Jesus said, “Here is your mother.” *And from that hour he took her into his own home.*

New Testament professor Amy Jill-Levine shared her reflections via video at our mid-week Lenten services about those near the cross of Jesus. She suggested that Jesus calling his mother, “Woman,” so seemingly odd and almost cold, was perhaps his way of saying not just to Mary, but to all women, my will is that you will never be all alone or uncared for. And the beloved disciple, never once named in the Gospel of John, is perhaps all of us, all of us beloved children of God, all of us called to care for anyone bereft of loved ones, to take them into our hearts and sometimes even to take them into our own homes. I wonder what that means for us and for widows and widowers, for orphans, for the homeless, for those seeking asylum.

What Jesus birthed through his death on the cross was a new understanding of family, a family to which all could belong. St. Paul in his letter to the churches in Galatia wrote:

As many of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; for all are one in Christ Jesus. In Jesus none of the distinctions about ethnic, social class, or sexual identity could prevent us from being part of a family where love and security and acceptance and mutual respect prevail.

Almighty God, with loving mercy look upon your family for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to... suffer death on the cross...

In his letter “to all God’s beloved in Rome...” Paul also wrote:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

I am struck by the little word “joy” in our gospel acclamation hymn, O Sacred Head Now Wounded: *Yet though despised and gory, I joy to call thee mine.* Someone has written that Good Friday is not so much a day of deep sadness as it is a day for joy. I think it is both. It is a day of sorrow for Jesus’ suffering and death for me, for us, a day of sadness that in the words of Isaiah, *he was despised and rejected, struck down by God and afflicted, wounded for our transgressions,*

crushed for our iniquities. And it is a day of joy, albeit muted, because he loved us so much that he willingly died for us. His was *the punishment that made us whole...his bruises [by which] we are healed...*so much for which to be grateful, to be joyful, to be able to walk freely together in newness of life.

Through Jesus' death we belong to him. We are his family. Healed and forgiven, we are free to love and care for each other. We are free *to provoke one another to love and good deeds.* We are his family, beloved mothers and fathers, beloved sisters and brothers, commanded by Jesus dying for us on his cross, to be there for each other in both our sorrows and our joys.

Amen.

JDS