

Tonight is a night we can put off no longer. It is the night in which the disciples had to face the awful reality that their beloved teacher was dead. It was the night in which the dream they had for him to restore Israel to its former glory died. It was the night in which their idea and precious hope of Messiah died. It was the night when healings, and speaking truth to power, and all that they loved about Jesus died also. It was the night their future, the future they had fondly imagined, died. It was a night, not just of one death, but of many.

We have heard this story many times, and it is as strange today as it has been every year for two thousand years since it was first told. It was the night that God in human form defied all expectation and refused to use power violently, even to save his own life. It was the night God with us instead chose solidarity with human pain, solidarity with every human victim everywhere across all time. It was the day God became the blood of Abel crying out from the ground. It was the day God became the blood of every innocent killed unjustly, even those killed by followers of Jesus since then in the Inquisition and the Crusades and the holy wars. It was the day God loved their tormentors, their oppressors, and their murderers.

It will not do to rush to tomorrow, to distract ourselves until dawn breaks on Easter Sunday. We are here, and Jesus is dead. Countless throngs of people have attempted to explain this death. Why? We cry out. Theologians may write endless pages about what this death means, but today, I submit to you, this is not our task. Today our task is, instead, to do something far more difficult. Our task is to join Jesus, whose death is before us, and to ask ourselves a single question. What in me, what in us, needs to die with him, this day?

Our baptismal liturgy, and the scriptures, tell us that through faith, we die and rise with Jesus. There is a time to be born, and there is a time to die, the scriptures say. What in us needs letting go?

A number of years ago it was advent, and I had just had the latest in a lengthy string of miscarriages. I did not want to go to church, because there I would be faced everywhere with talk of pregnant Mary, and I did not think I could stand

it after yet another loss. But in the end I decided to go. The church I attended was a church of artists, who had created stations of the cross which hung all around the nave all year long. So there I sat, during advent, and my eye fell on the station of the cross nearest me. It was a painting of Mary, weeping, holding her dead son Jesus in her arms. In that moment I realized the Great Story of Judeo Christian tradition was big enough to hold me and my grief. In that moment what died in me was the false idea that God had done this to me, and instead what I faced was the reality that God had already joined me in my loss and was weeping with me.

In the end, what needs to die in us is all our false notions of God. Our false notions that God would be a vengeful and angry and violent being whose sense of justice can only be satisfied by blood. That image is and always was a human invention, which since the blood of Abel God has been seeking to eradicate. In order to love the lord our God with all our hearts, souls, and minds, we need, and we have, a God who is utterly worthy of that love, instead of the false images we as humans constantly seek to create. In the end, for us on Good Friday, the image of God we need is Jesus, loving his disciples and the whole world all the way to the end. We have a God who has joined us in our pain, and we have a God who shows us the way through it.

Light does shine in the darkness, but for us today, on Good Friday, it is a strange light. It is the light of the face of Jesus Christ, in whom all the pain and suffering of the world is concentrated. In the face of Christ we see those who are sick and dying. We see those killed by our bombs and the dead of 9/11. We see those we have hurt and those we cannot forgive. Light shines in the darkness, but for us on Good Friday it is a strange light. It is the light of the face of Jesus Christ, who was willing to walk into his own suffering in order to love the world and provide us a way to forgive and be forgiven. It is the light of the face of Jesus Christ, eyes closed, finally at rest, as he says for all time, it is finished.