

Thomas R. Cook  
St. Stephen's Church – Edina, Minnesota  
9:00 and 11:15 a.m. Celebrations of the Holy Eucharist  
The Second Sunday in Lent; February 25, 2018

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## “Not Lightly into the Darkness, but with Love”

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Scripture: Mark 8:31-38; 2 Lent B RCL

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I can hardly blame Peter for his apparent indiscretion in calling Jesus out. I mean... it really is a lousy business plan. You work hard to try to build a popular religious movement to be embraced by all the people, and Jesus starts carrying on about rejection, suffering, and death? Really? *Well, I have to go and die now. Anybody want to come along?* No wonder Peter told him to stop talking that way. It isn't particularly inviting.

But Jesus wasn't trying to be a success. He wasn't attempting to command the next great public or religious movement. He just wasn't about greatness. He was about the peculiar business of giving away his life, because nothing else would suffice if love was to be the thing. Don't get me wrong... I don't think he wanted to die. I don't think he was being overly dramatic when he revealed the suffering that was to come. I'm not even sure that he had to die. I just think he knew that to be a different example, to call his people to account for their selfishness, their sinfulness, their violence and greed and will to power, to remind them that they were made for love

and that they were responsible for each other... that just wouldn't go down so well with the people clinging to power. And he was right.

And are things so different now? Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas said:

*As nightfall does not come all at once, neither does oppression. In both instances, there is a twilight when everything remains seemingly unchanged. And it is in such twilight that we all must be most aware of the change in the air ---however slight--- lest we become unwitting victims of the darkness.<sup>1</sup>*

People ask me of late how I preach the love of God in times like these. And I have to admit that with all the noise and rancor in society now, I feel it is harder to say something meaningful in the face of such trials as our times bring. But how can I not preach the love of God? Would we not be disingenuous should we fail to acknowledge the darkness encroaching upon our times? Or to acknowledge that there are those who seem bent on taking us down beyond the twilight toward the dark? But it is for these times that the love of God was revealed by Jesus ---yes, on a cross--- and by his choice for love. Though it may not always feel so comforting, Jesus reminds us that the love of God is present to the joy *and* the suffering, the success *and* the failure, the loveable *and* the despicable, the light *and* the darkness. We experience them both in this life, even as people of faith in Jesus; perhaps especially as

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<sup>1</sup> From Synthesis for 2 Lent B 2018.

people of faith. Evelyn Underhill once told a friend who was struggling with the reality of the cross that “...*if you do not accept it deliberately, why then it will be forced upon you in some subtle and ingenious way...*”<sup>2</sup> I might say it is forced upon too many people not so subtly at all.

But we Christians know something of the dark... and something of the light that overcomes it. Let us not be so bewildered of these days; it is for these days that we are called. Humanity seems always to return to desperation and doom, and someone must be willing to open these doors and invite the world to this table to remind a people that we are loved beyond measure. When humankind feels the sting of despair and the confusion that is born of suffering, isn't that when Jesus says, “Here is the way... Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me.” Live... like... me. Share like me. Care like me.

I'm not asking that we embrace suffering as good. I'm not suggesting we invite it. Rather, like a bout of nasty weather, we understand that it comes, and we endure it, we persevere through it, we live within it; we act, so far as in us lies, to soothe the suffering. Because beyond the darkest cloud lies the brightening horizon of the next good day.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

I wonder... did Peter hear Jesus when he said, "After three days I will rise again?" Eventually Peter did. Now, it's our turn.