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Grace and Holy Trinity Church
Good Friday
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This Lent, I have been keenly aware of the relationships Jesus models for us in his ministry. It seems like each week we had a chance to see how the Messiah manifested himself to different people from different walks of life in his context. First there was Nicodemus who came in the dark of night, then the woman at the well in the bright light of day. There was the man born blind through no fault of his own or of his family and there was Lazarus who died for the Glorification of God. In these four individuals the powerful, the powerless, those who suffer, those who mourn, all of the people whom Jesus preached about in the Beatitudes are brought to life. For a glorious moment they get to bask in the light of Christ. Nicodemus shares in his wisdom. The Samaritan woman shares in his grace. The man born blind shares in his healing touch. Lazarus shares his glorious resurrection.

We are invited to be like each of them in our own lives. We are invited to allow Jesus' wisdom, grace, healing, and glory be part of our lives every day. Every day we are invited to consider how we might be present to the Son of God, how we might follow him.

But today- on Good Friday- on the day when nearly everyone abandoned him. On the day when Judas betrayed him, Simon-Peter denied him, Caiaphas condemned him, and Pilate sentenced him. When only the women stayed by his side, and even his mother was ushered away by his beloved disciple and he was left alone on the hard wood of the cross to die. Today we are invited to come close, to be in proximity to Jesus, to be a witness to the torturous death which he died.

We are invited to consider if we would be there with Jesus when he suffered for us. We are invited to ponder what it means to be there when they crucify our Lord. We are invited to place ourselves in proximity to the cross, even if we'd rather run away, even if we'd rather watch at a distance, even if we'd rather do anything but be here in the shadow of the cross.

Today's liturgy is a special one, not only because we commemorate the death of our Lord, but because this is the one day a year when at Grace and Holy Trinity all 5 congregations come together for one time of solemn observance. This is the one time when our Red Door Congregation, the 20 or so folks who come together for Prayers for Healing each week are joined by folks from each of our Sunday worship services the Traditional, Crossroads, Classic and Port of Grace services. This is when we are in nearest proximity to one another and I feel by extension that in being so close to one another we are closer to the man Jesus than on any other day of the year (including Christmas and Easter).

Today is the day that we remember that despite our desires to run away, we have promised to follow Christ even unto death. Those of us who have been baptized have died and been raised again into eternal life in our baptism, and through this baptism we are united with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But on this Good Friday we are invited to remember the frailty, the weakness, the fragile nature of Jesus' human form.

In a minute we will be invited to participate in the praying of the Solemn Collects- a time to pray for people everywhere according to their needs, the Church, the People of the Earth, those who are suffering in mind, body or spirit, and those who are unaware of the Good News. These prayers are designed to remind us of our own needs and those of others they are a time to remember the lesson which Jesus taught us - to love one another as He has loved us.

Loving one another requires being close to one another. This means that we need to be in proximity to one another, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We have promised to show up. We have promised to care for one another: the hungry, the lonely, the sick, the incarcerated, the old, the young, the rich, the poor, the middle class, those we agree with, those we disagree with, those who we trust, and those who are skeptical of- we all are called to be present to one another. This is how we become followers of Christ.

We show up.

This Lent some members of this congregation read a book called *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson. This book was chosen by Virginia Commonwealth University as its Common Book for the 2016-17 academic year and in it the author dives into questions of justice and mercy as it relates to the criminal justice system in the United States. In particular he looks at his work with the Equal Justice Initiative which works with individuals who are on death row and who have been wrongly convicted.

I read this book - honestly it was the first book that I read from cover to cover since my son was born and I read it mostly in the middle of the night. It made me cry, it made me think, it made me want to show up for those in need, but this week it made me think about what it means for me to be in proximity to the Cross. What does it mean that I am a baptized Christian and that I confess the faith of Christ crucified?

What I think it means is that I need to embody in my daily life and work not only the relationships that Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the man born blind, and Lazarus had with Jesus, but also the relationship that Bryan Stevenson has with his clients, one of proximity.

Stevenson writes that “Proximity has taught me some basic and humbling truths, including this vital lesson: Each of us is more than the worst thing we’ve ever done. ... I’ve come to believe that the true measure of our commitment to justice, the character of our society, our commitment to the rule of law, fairness and equality cannot be measured by how we treat the rich, the powerful, the privileged, and the respected among us. The true measure of our character is how we treat the poor, the disfavored, the accused, the incarcerated and the condemned”¹

I often find myself on Good Friday (and the days leading up to it) singing that beloved Spiritual “Were you there when they Crucified my Lord?” the melody is haunting and the words are easy to recall. But the lyrics are raw and break open my soul in ways that I cannot fully express. The question of who was there when Jesus died, the question of if I would have been brave enough to stand at the foot of the cross, the longing to be there, yet the fear of what would happen if I did show up... all of that is tied into that simple song and it boils down to this-

¹ Stevenson, Bryan. *Just Mercy* page 17

Can I be here now?

Can I be at the cross with the condemned Christ?

Can I be present to those who are in need?

Can I be an advocate for those who have no voice?

Can I be a friend to the friendless?

Can I be in proximity to suffering and respond with justice?

That's what I am struggling with as I sit at the foot of the cross today- I'm here now- with all of you.

Now what?

Amen