

Good Friday Sermon 2018

When John tells the story of the passion of Jesus, it is clear that Jesus is in control of events. The chief priests and the soldiers come looking for him in the garden to arrest him. Jesus asks, Whom are you looking for? They say, Jesus of Nazareth. When he says, I am he, they fall down before him, as if he were a divinity. When he carries the cross to Golgotha, in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, he needs Simon of Cyrene to help him with the cross. Not in John's Gospel. He carries it himself.

In John's Gospel, the cross is his glorification. Glory means brightness, shining, brilliance. In Matthew's Gospel, there is darkness from noon to 3 when he is crucified. Not in John's Gospel. Jesus is crucified at high noon, at the most dazzling part of the day. The cross is the way the world will be saved. The cross is the way that he will gather all things to himself. The cross is victory.

We see this in events from the cross. John says that the soldiers cast lots for his tunic. And John gives this interesting detail about the tunic: it had no seams. It was woven as one piece of fabric, from the top down. Perhaps John is saying that the cross is what will unify the brokenness of the world.

Jesus does the same thing in terms of relationships. He unifies from the cross. He sees his mother, and he sees the disciple whom he loves, and he brings them together. From now on these two would take care of each other. Jesus creates community from the cross, he brings the world together.

If he continued to live, the robe would belong to him. But in his death, this unifying symbol is given to others. If he continued to live, he would take care of his mother throughout his life. But upon his death, he creates this new community. His death brings unity and new possibilities to the world.

In the other Gospels, he is mocked, and given sour wine to drink. In John's Gospel, he is the one, like a king who is telling the servants, I am thirsty, and they offer him wine to drink.

In John's Gospel, nobody will mock him when he is on the cross. And when we know exactly who he is on the cross, and that his job is concluded, he says, It is finished. He is the one declaring when it's done. The mission I came to accomplish, the love I came to lavish, the light I came to shed, the

truth I came to tell, the life I came create, the lost I came to gather- all the work that the Father gave me to do, I have done.

And then John says, They placed his body in a new tomb in a garden. Matthew, Mark and Luke simply say that his body was placed in a rock-hewed tomb. John is the only one who uses the word garden. For John, Jesus is the seed that has been placed in the ground. Remember he said, Unless a seed falls in the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. We are here today as the fruit of the death and resurrection of Jesus. His death accomplished life for the world.

Let me share about another death, and the new life that came forth. Fifty years ago this weekend, Martin Luther King Jr. traveled to Memphis to support the sanitation workers who were striking. These black workers were toiling in unsafe conditions. Two of them had recently been crushed in the back of a sanitation truck. There were no black supervisors; pay was terrible. King came down to speak at a rally at Mason Temple. Even the balconies were overflowing.

On the night before he was assassinated, he spoke these words: "I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land! And so I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!"

Martin Luther King was assassinated the next day. After he was killed, the city settled with striking workers, and recognized their union. They got showers, uniforms, higher wages and African-American supervisors.

And the words of Dr. King still resonate. His "I have a dream" speech still rings in our ears: "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character." We are still working to fulfill that dream. But his death could not stop the dream.

How much more so with Jesus. In fact, because of his death, the world receives life. The way John sees the death of Jesus, it was his glory. It was the event that brought unity to a broken world. Because when Jesus is lifted up on a cross, he gathers all creation to himself. Amen.