

Good Friday Third Word St. Paul's 2018

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Crucifixion is hideous. I never could watch that Mel Gibson movie. I wouldn't want to be there. Perhaps you would. But, for real, the Gospel of John, records this ...

Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour that disciple took her to his own.

I did once wait for a young man to die. He'd been in an accident, and the time came when his parents made the hard decision to remove life support. Death was a whole day coming. One parent couldn't bear to leave his side. The other parent couldn't bear to be in the room. Each of them loving and sorrowing in their own way. I remember thinking of the Isaac Watts hymn, When I survey the Wondrous Cross – did e'er such love and sorrow meet.

Here is Mary, the Lord's mother. From the beginning, Christian eyes have fixed on the mournful mother. *Stabat Mater dolorosa* – At the cross her station keeping, stood the mournful mother weeping, close by Jesus to the last. The sorrowing mother who looks at her son on the cross and weeps – you who pass by, is there any sorrow like my sorrow? But for Saint John, his Gospel we heard, the way of the cross is the way of Glory. It's a strange glory. In John's Gospel, it's not the empty tomb where Jesus is first glorified, it's the Cross.

John 12: *“And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all people unto me.” This he said signifying what death he should die.* John believes we will be drawn to Jesus by the lifting up, before the rising up. Golgotha is the heart of darkness, the hope of the world is dying on the Cross. It’s an unthinkable stride of the soul to see glory in this. For John the Cross is not the eclipse of God’s glory, it’s the shining forth, the epiphany.

There is a tradition that this “disciple whom Jesus loved,” whom Jesus gave to his mother and she to him, is the John of this Gospel, the John who sees the cross as Jesus glorified. Lots can be said about symbolism, how Mary and John represent all people, or the church.

But for this Good Friday, I just see two human beings watching Jesus die:
A mother who knows the piercing sword of grief, cutting her body and soul.
And, a disciple who surveys the wondrous Cross and knows the glory of God.

Neither John nor Mary choose this for themselves. God creates from the Cross. Our Lord forms a community born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God. Born of the meeting of love and sorrow in the Cross of Jesus Christ. Born in a love stronger than death, so we – us, together in Christ - can live and die with a peace that passes all understanding.

Still, I wonder what it was like for John and Mary, so different but together in Jesus, over the days and weeks that followed. As I wonder what it was like for those parents in the QE2.
Amen.