

All Saints Episcopal Church

Steenrijk

Leidenstratt

Willemstad, Curacao

Good Friday

March 29, 2024

DRAFT

“Another Thorn”

by the Rev. Joseph Parrish

DRAFT

The Gospel: John 19:23-27

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus,
they took his clothes and divided them
into four parts, one for each soldier.

They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.” This was to fulfill what the scripture says, “They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.” And that is what the soldiers did. Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside

her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

Dear Lord, hear our prayers. Amen.

I spent three months in federal detention, but not for what you might expect, no I am a United States citizen and an Episcopal priest, but for eighteen years I served as a volunteer US federal chaplain for a large detention center in

the US. (Now dozens have taken my place, thank the Lord.) I could come and go as long as I stayed a couple of hours behind locked metal gates and doors each week. And I lived among those who had been detained for one reason or another. I met many amazing people, a Cuban doctor seeking asylum, and a man who had lived in the belly of a cacao ship halfway across the Atlantic Ocean from the Ivory Coast with his male partner before being discovered, and a woman from Colombia who had come under a death threat from a drug cartel:

she was the mayor of a town there and had gotten on a plane without any identification immediately after learning a contract had been let for her.

A very few were convicted drug dealers, one a very personable person whom the guards confided had been stopped with a trunk full of drugs. Some wore Orange as 'the convicted' but most wore Innocent Blue. There were Russians, Chinese, Syrians, Mexicans, and from just about anywhere in the world where there was war or

oppression. They came for safety and shelter and well-being.

So, what prompted me to reminisce about the long ago past? The Pope's visit to the women's prison in Rome. It actually boiled up in my spirit as what seemed to me personally as tokenism using the poor and oppressed for validation. How can someone say such a thing about the Holy Father?

Alas, I am a Protestant through and through, so protesting is in my blood.

Why?

Years ago when I began my odd volunteer ministry in the city where I was a Rector of a church, I met strong opposition from a Roman Catholic group who had been discharged from the Detention Center by apparently trying to ‘stir up’ the inmates. And possibly my most endearing memory is being excoriated in writing by the Village Voice for my ministry that had taken over from the previous group. “No good deed goes unpunished.”

A friendly bishop of the Episcopal Church urged the Presiding Bishop to

give me some seed money for my ministry to buy Bibles and various meditational and scriptural materials.

Over the years we gave out thousands of Bibles and devotional materials to those who had been detained. And we had a prayer service every week.

Yet, even on the inside I was once nearly assaulted by a guard because our prayer service went a few minutes late. And the group 'outside' had very little use for me. Fortunately I would arrive after dark and leave later, so the outside

daytime demonstrators never intercepted me.

But I learned the problems of many of the poor and oppressed. So in my mind, to use them as a backdrop of foot washing set me on edge. My subconscious made me write this.

I have analyzed this Judas sort of expression, as some will see it, to wonder how the Holy Father will raise up hundreds of priests to serve as volunteer chaplains in prisons all over the world. Human dignity is ignored in so many prisons and detention centers.

While I was an active volunteer chaplain, my job was to advocate for those in my care. No one stayed in isolation for more than an hour or two, as best I could determine. But now, now, isolation is apparently being widely used in the Detention centers as never before. We religious folk have railed against using Isolation routinely for one of the largest prisons in New York City, with little results. But this inhumanity has now spread to Detention Centers.

So in my gut, I am offended by a religious show using prisoners as a

backdrop. And I know that pointing a finger means three others are pointing at me. Yea, verily, I do shout “Crucify him” with everyone else.

May God help us all to see the sins we are committing by not protesting against the dismal care of prisoners, and by not insisting the system be reformed. How many of the prisoners there in Rome had suffered so many horrible personal indignities as young children? How many were totally innocent? We still put those to death in many places. The Episcopal Church has many

resolutions condemning capital punishment, but the minority still refuse to do so, and their voices seem to control the day. Alas.

Let us all help the poor and oppressed. May we make Good Friday, Good. Amen.

Description: The common use of isolation in detention centers and prisons now should upset all of us. We are the ones to begin to change the system. Let us rail against inhumanities toward prisoners.

Tags: Holy, Father, prison, prisoners, detention, poor, oppressed, chaplains, capital punishment

St. John's Episcopal Church

61 Broad Street

Elizabeth, New Jersey 07201

Good Friday (ecumenical)

At Second Presbyterian Church

1161 East Jersey Street

Elizabeth, New Jersey 07201

April 6, 2012

A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish

“Yes, we are loved”

DRAFT

The Gospel: John 19:23-27

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.” This was to fulfill what the scripture says, “They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.” And that is what the soldiers did. Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the

wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

Lord, help us to find family love in those who believe. Amen.

This is one of the "middle last words" of Jesus on the cross. He is finally able

to tolerate the death pain for a few moments, and Jesus' first thought is about the ones who loved him the most: his beloved Mother, Mary, and the beloved disciple, whom many have named John. These two he places in the bond of family love, family connection, family relationship.

Some older children from high school recently discussed with me their feelings about not having had a father in their lives. It is not such an uncommon thing, believe it or not. Many children today grow up without either knowing who

their father is or without the presence of their biological father. This has produced a crisis of identity in some children, a feeling of loneliness in many, and a sense of profound loss in most.

Divorce is more the norm than the exception in this generation of high school students and younger. We now have a whole generation of children who have no biological connection to anyone but a mother and perhaps a few of her relatives. In these situations their mother has probably been both a mother and a father to these children, probably a good

replacement, having heard the stories of the father who ran away, disappeared, got into trouble, whatever. The fathers themselves were likely victims of the same loss. And the feeling perpetuates itself from generation to generation. It usually does not get better, but only worse.

We are surprised by guns being trained on other students in classrooms, but the self-loathing that must underlie such violent behavior is nearer the surface for some children than others. We each react differently to a sense of

loss of a parent. I am guessing boys react more to the loss of a mother, actually, but that is only my speculation. But mothers are remarkable beings. They are survivors, they tend to be the ones who nurture their children the most, and they have a more profound biological connection through the birth process than do fathers, who are more onlookers. It takes the serious attention of a father to bond with his children as much as they bond to their mother.

Mothers have a miraculous way with their children, probably from the first time they feed their little baby.

Mary probably breast fed Jesus; Mary likely was the one who fed Jesus as a little child. And probably Mary continued to feed Jesus until he left home to go on his journey towards John the Baptist in the Jordan River. So Jesus was surely quite close to his mother. Even when Jesus had disciples, his mother was still there in the Cana wedding story and elsewhere. Her pushiness seemed to grate a bit on Jesus,

but alas, he seemed to be putty in her hands. He did just what she implied for him to do in her little suggestion, “They have no wine.”

Amazing isn't it that the Son of God was so wrapped up in his earthly mother? But from the very beginning when she said “Yes” to God to have Jesus born in her, she took that “Yes” seriously. It was a “Yes” that was far more than OK, I'll bear the little brat and then be done with him. She obviously nurtured him, cared for him, perhaps a little too much, and she likely at times

was even a “smothering” mother, not that little men don’t really like a bit of that smothering. It is “Mothering” with a small “s” in front of it—“smothering,”—which can be both good and bad. After all, Jesus had the whole world to save, the past world, his present world, our world, and the world yet to come. He had to look after billions who would follow him eventually. So his attention had to change from his mother to others.

But on that hard cross, his work was nearly finished. His words from the cross were very measured, from what we

know. But in this time of his excruciating pain and suffocation, he reached out to save the only one who had stuck with him from his birth and before. He placed his mother in the care of the one person who had loved him absolutely, who had understood his meaning before all the others, and who would follow him right to the base of the cross when all the other men in Jesus life had apparently abandoned him. The beloved disciple was chosen to care for the one person Jesus cared about most in all the world, his own mother.

Tradition has it that the beloved disciple lived to a ripe old age, and that he took Mary to a safer place in Ephesus to look after her. It is only a tradition, of course, one will hear it if one goes to Ephesus today, but perhaps Jesus could discern the likelihood of the beloved disciple being the one who would look after his mother better than any one else he knew. The beloved disciple was not the impatient, impertinent, compulsive one like Peter; he wasn't the disciples' leader, but he seemed to have had a profound understanding of what Jesus

was all about, and his stories seemed to attract a staunch following of some others now referred to as the “Johannine school” who likely penned both the gospel as well as three small letters which were incorporated into the bible canon. And many think their writing towers over most every other text in the New Testament as far as putting Jesus Christ “into perspective”: that Jesus was Son of God from the beginning, not just from his mother’s womb. In the fourth gospel, Jesus towers above all others in a way that is so profound it is

“theological,” meaning it seriously has formed and informed all future thinking about what Jesus’ physical entry onto our planet and into our solar system and galaxy and universe really meant.

Without the fourth gospel, we would be awash in a myriad of possibilities about Jesus Christ, and indeed the gnostics would have had an even bigger “heyday” with their musings and thinking and self-generated “knowledge.” This fourth gospel product from the followers of the beloved disciple really was uniquely turned to place Jesus into a picture far

beyond anything we probably could have imagined, a picture of the so-called “cosmic Christ”, but One who really transcends the cosmos; yes, One who even created the cosmos, so Christ far outstrips cosmology or any other bound we may have placed him in.

Yet, as Jesus really is dying a very human death on the cross, he is not at all above human feelings and emotions.

And the bottom line of love tells us how much his love means to him. He cares for those about to be bereaved. Maybe a loved one of yours is near death. But

even in that troubled state, Jesus reaches out to one about to be bereaved to find them a solution, a helper in times of trouble; if some tried to kill Lazarus, whom Jesus loved; why would they not also conceive of killing Jesus' mother? Who else could have loved him more? Erase those stories of little boy Jesus; erase the stories of his growing up; erase the humanity that Jesus so boldly exhibited. Kill his mother and then place Jesus above the reach of humanity. Put Jesus on a pedestal, high above us all, aloof from humanity, separated from the

reality of the human situation. Up there, Jesus couldn't affect anything. But Jesus had the inescapable sense of what humans feel and need, as he was indeed human. Jesus had the luxury of looking on those who so loved him that they were willing to stand there beside him when that may have meant their own certain death, death by association with the traitor of the Roman Empire—surely they may have conspired with Jesus.

So, Jesus' solution was to place those most vulnerable directly with each other to protect and love one another as a

family should. Mary and the beloved disciple belonged together, and Jesus made it so.

Some one, some time, whom we love dearly may be ripped from us by an accident, an illness, or by some other unimaginable event. And it in that time, Jesus is walking with us, looking with compassion upon us, just as he did look upon his dear mother and his dear follower. In that same way, Jesus is actually reading the feelings of our heart. And Jesus has provided Another to Console us.

This is pragmatic religion at its best—finding someone to replace the one we are losing or whom we may lose.

Christianity is not airy fairy. Christianity is gut solid. Christianity is where the ‘rubber hits the road.’ Christianity comes to affect us right where we hurt, not beyond it, not below it, not ‘over there’, but right here in our heart, our mind, our spirit. Christ is with us. God is with us. That is the gospel message. God loves us so much that even death will not separate us from God, or from each other in Christ.

Look into the loving eyes of Christ.
Even in his pain, he thinks of us just as
he thought about his dear mother and his
dearest friend. Find his healing way and
we will find something that will change
our world. It is real. Christ's love is
real. And Christ really loves us.

Amen.

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