

Good Friday

Wellesley Village Church 2018

Scripture: interweaving of Jesus' birth & passion narratives | Psalm 22 | Mark 15:25-39

In his book, *Night*, Elie Wiesel reflects on his experience with his father in the Nazi German concentration camp at Auschwitz and Buchenwald. In one particular passage that sears itself onto the reader's mind, a stark, fragmented remembering of a haunting night, he captures this experience as a whole. He writes:

The three victims mounted together onto chairs.

The three necks were placed at the same moment within the nooses.

"Long live liberty!" cried two adults.

But the boy was silent.

"Where is God? Where is He?" someone behind me asked.

At a sign from the head of the camp, the three chairs were tipped over. ...

[The child] was still alive when I passed in front of him...his eyes not yet extinguished.

Behind me, I heard the same man asking:

"Where is God now?"

And I heard a voice within me answer him:

"Where is He? Here he is—He is hanging here on this gallows."

In *Night*, everything is inverted, every value destroyed. The same could be said about this night, this stark, fragmented story we are remembering here, now.

Mark's gospel presents us with the earliest and, in some ways, rawest account of Jesus' traumatic death by betrayal and crucifixion. In the garden of Gethsemane, he pleads for God to let him avoid death. Unlike heroic victims in other tales of noble death, Jesus, like the boy in *Night*, is silent when interrogated by the rulers. Instead of offering an elevated speech as he dies, Jesus, in a raw picture of his

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humanity, cries out in his native Aramaic tongue: "Eli, Eli lama sabachtani" (My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?)

Despite the preference for many of us to avoid discomfort and jump from the Hosanna's of Palm Sunday to the Hallelujah of Easter—in our Christian story and in our lives—despite this, every year we find ourselves back here again, at the foot of the cross.

For Jesus' friends and family, Saturday held no greater answers or hope, just found them in the middle of gut-wrenching pain, two days that might as well have been 20 years. No one could have known what was coming or when.

Now as then, Good Friday leaves us with no easy resolutions, no simple answers or trite affirmations of faith. How often we, too, find ourselves and our world entombed in Good Friday and Holy Saturday pain, wondering "How long?!" Wondering "Where is God?" "Is God?"

Where is God in the face of such suffering?  
It's easy to find God in sunsets and sushi,  
In mountain hikes and walks in the woods,  
In laughter and love.

But where is God in the face terminal illness and lives taken too soon?  
In the midst of gun violence and war; climate change and refugees?  
Where is our all-powerful God then?

In a radical and revolutionary reversal of reality, an inconceivable inversion of power, Jesus' followers looked at

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that cross and saw God. God's own body hung upon that tree. On this day we proclaim the utter foolishness of Christ crucified, of God abandoned by God and scapegoated by humanity. Even the best of us—the most faithful and passionate disciples among us—scapegoat, betray, deny and desert God in the greatest hour of need.

Why? For what purpose? To what end, God?

Good Friday, like all suffering, leaves us with no simple answers. No platitudes or trite affirmations of faith can bear the weight of this day, can make it any lighter for God, for Jesus or for us.

Yet our scripture tells us this. God has descended into the deepest depths of hell on earth. The worst that humanity could throw at God, at one another it did. The power of God is most profoundly illustrated and made known to us not in military might and world domination and control but in utter powerlessness, in weakness, in all those Golgotha's—"those places of the skull"—where the forces of death create hell on earth, where we cry out: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me. Where are you?"

If we want to see the fullness of God, we must be able to look here. It offers us no easy answers, but it does give us new eyes with which to look for the presence of God in our own world, new ears to hear the voice of God crying out in our midst, and new hearts supple, courageous and faithful enough to risk witnessing—to risk truly seeing Christ in the face of others, and accompanying them—and allowing them to truly see and love and accompany us—even in our brokenness and suffering, even through the valley of the shadow of death.

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Where is God? "Here he is—He is hanging here on this cross."