Sermon - Good Friday: Proper Liturgy
The Reverend Dale T. Grandfield
April 14, 2017

Isaiah 52:13-53:12
Psalm 22
Hebrews 10:16-25
John 18:1-19:42

“See, from his head, his hands, his feet, sorrow and love flow mingled down: who knew that those two things could mingle, could go together: sorrow and love.” ¹ They sound a dissonant chord, which begs for resolution - let us have it all wrapped up, please.

In a certain way this day does leave us with the story wrapped up. It is finished.² As if we were one who had seen the movie before, our minds my just as well want to run ahead to the next scene: what’s coming tomorrow, and the following. But here, now, we’re called to stop and stay with this moment in the Passion, this moment of completion, but which doesn’t seem like it should end this way.

“When I survey the wondrous cross,”³ says the hymnwriter, when I survey: here we’re called to survey, not so much in the sense of looking over the big picture, but in the sense of intricately mapping the cross, the crucifixion, the Crucified One. That’s a hard thing to survey - this day is not calling us to an easy task. The horror alone is enough for us to turn away, the shame, grotesque, disfigured: who is this man hanged dead on a cross that we spend the day contemplating?

Paul says “The message of the cross is foolishness,”⁴ and indeed it is. What a silly religion, to have a God who dies, not heroic, not illustrious, but simply dies. Foolishness indeed - it is a mystery, the cross that constantly bears deeper examination; one glance isn’t enough, prolonged study of this scene, of the intersection of divine love and human sorrow, where thorns compose so rich a crown.

What are we to do? The scene would be too much if it were just the sorrow that flows down from that head, and hands, and feet: but sorrow is only part of the story; the other is love, love that is willing to enter into the gate and portal of death, in the deepest horror of our existence, not just to touch upon it, or glance it, but to enter in fully, submit, and let itself be taken into death’s embrace.

The weakness of it all - the utter weakness, the complete nonsense - could he not have gotten down from there? Could he not have figured out another way to do this? And the dark despair: How does what he did really do anything for me? We have to let ourselves out into those places, it seems, on this day, in order to find ourselves truly embraced by the Crucified One:

¹ Hymn 474, “When I survey the wondrous cross”, stanza 3 by Isaac Watts.
² John 19:30.
³ Hymn 474, stanza 1.
⁴ 1 Corinthians 1:18.
The embrace is a mirror: for we are called to become cruciform in during this great Baptismal Feast to realize that in the waters of life we have been taken down into Christ’s death; this cross is ours now, too, not just his; it is the altar of the universe, on which we come to present ourselves a living sacrifice, on which the whole of creation lifts its heart to God, on which even God self-offers:

“Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small; love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.”\(^5\) Stop here and stay - that is the message of this rite; stop here and stay - we bring in a wooden cross and place it here and allow ourselves the opportunity to survey, to pray and watch, to come and touch or kiss, to act out here the deep gratitude we feel for the love we encounter here: and to live into this Great Mystery, to offer ourselves again, soul, life, all.

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\(^5\) Hymn 474, stanza 4.