Good Friday || April 18, 2025 || NOON St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Hanover, || The Reverend Amy Whitcomb Slemmer, Esq.

Good and Difficult Friday

We have arrived at the Middle Day of our Triduum observance: this three day period that offers the emotional roller coaster of hope, joy, heartbreak and grief. Our observance began last night with Maundy Thursday, where we reenacted Jesus' gathering of his friends for a shared supper, practiced his version of love – bending down to each other and serving as Jesus served. We washed each others' feet, and we shared Holy Communion.

I've encouraged us throughout Lent to bravely engage our full senses. To put down screens and distractions and to look up at nature, to listen and count natural sounds and reconnect with the beauty of God in nature, and today we build toward a sensory crescendo that we know will come on Sunday.

But we must faithfully stand at the foot of the cross today, and not get ahead of ourselves or avert our eyes to the horror of Jesus' death. We must look at the cross and be in communion with our ancient siblings who have finally come to see that Jesus was serious, prescient and as God's son, faithful to fulfilling his mission among us.

He did not serve himself by overpowering the cross or the forces that nailed him to it, he gave his full self over to unimaginable suffering, and as we mark this day – Jesus gave himself over to death.

Good Friday doesn't feel great, does it? It is uncomfortable. It is desperately sad. Look at our sanctuary. It is bare. No candles, no shiny implements for communion – and to me, most devastatingly of all, no perpetual light honoring our ciborium – the niche that holds the consecrated elements of bread and wine.

Yet, here we are – invited to join all of those mourning at the foot of the cross. We join a group of Marys – Jesus' mother, Jesus's beloved friends Mary Magdalene, Mary, Clopus' wife, and Mary of Bethany, who just a week ago demonstrated her love and understanding and belief of Jesus' pending death.

Are people weeping? Are they afraid to be caught and likewise condemned to death or to guilt by association with Jesus? Are they walking by or peeking a glance at the human brokenness of Jesus' pierced body in utter silence?

We know many early followers scattered and hid, but we can not.

We gather to worship and witness this extraordinary man, Jesus of Nazareth. We gather at the foot and within the shadow of the cross, at a crossroads ourselves experiencing deep grief, sorrow and the physical and emotional weight of his profound love -- that this man gave his life, sacrificed himself for our own redemption.

Let us honor the silence. Let us give witness to the fact that even in his agony, Jesus calls for the beloved disciple to care for his mother – even in anguish he attends to the needs of the world. May we be reminded that Jesus bequeaths the same expectation to each of us, to look beyond ourselves to those who need us in the world.

May each of us take Jesus' cry as an invitation to honor his sacrifice by laying our wounds, our worries, our deepest grief, shame or secrets at the foot of the cross.

While Good Friday feels awful, may we embody awe – may we stand in awe at the abundance of God's love which is not extinguished on the cross, but rather transformed. God's Love that survives death, knows each of us – knows you and calls you by name, even in the small still voice at the foot of the cross. God is nailed upon the cross, and Jesus died for us. His love survives, and is with us, binding us, one to another as we work through the pain, mystery and darkness of this day, this good and difficult Friday. Amen+