

19th April 2019 (Good Friday, Year C)

Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Psalm 30(31):2,6,12-13,15-17,25; Hebrews 4:14-16,5:7-9; John 18:1-19:42.

... they crucified him with two others, one on either side with Jesus in the middle.

We gather to celebrate the most important moment in our liturgical year; Jesus who gives up himself for us. Yesterday, Holy Thursday, we observed Jesus who came not to be served, but to serve as he washed the feet of those who travelled with him. Today we see Jesus take his service a step further, giving up his life for our salvation.

If we observe carefully what the gospel according to John says about Jesus' death, we notice that it happens in a garden and that Jesus is crucified 'in the middle.' To the untrained eye these might be minor details, but not for John! As he writes this gospel, John is remembering another garden, the garden of Eden, with the tree of life growing in the middle of the garden.

Death, grief and loss are often very difficult moments for us to understand to deal with, yet they are emotions we all need to go through. At times we suffer the physical death of a loved one, a friend or a relative; at other times we suffer the loss of things around us. Life is forever changing and we often cannot explain why things have to change.

The gospel according to Matthew tells us that when Jesus died the earth shook in an earthquake (Mt 27:51-54). When the earth shakes violently, the environment around us is threatened and often changed. Jesus' death changed the way things were and the disciples were invited to look at reality in a new way. The centurion declares: 'Truly this man was God's Son!' (Mt 27:54).

At times the world seems to spin around us, we lose track of our surroundings, and the environment we are familiar with is shaken at its foundations; we often question our faith. We are not alone in this. The disciples around Jesus too questioned their faith; one betrayed him, another denied he knew him and the others ran away to safety. Only John stood beneath the cross til the end.

In his gospel John looks at Jesus' death from another perspective. He invites us to go back to the first garden, the garden of Eden, and look at the tree in the middle of the garden, the tree of life (Gen 2:9). By placing Jesus' cross 'in the middle' and in a garden, John is inviting us to look at the cross of Jesus as the tree of life. From this cross comes for us new life, we are living a new creation.

Resurrection and new life, which we will celebrate on Saturday and Sunday, does not precede but follows the crucifixion. With Jesus we need to first die on the cross to be able to live the resurrection. Crucifixion, death, grief and loss all seem dark to us, but from death rises new life, a new creation. Today we are tempted to run away and protest 'where is God?' Yet while we may not be able to see God, we know that he is there, right besides us.

As a Body of Christ and a People of God we are going through our own suffering, grief and death. In our own world a terrible earthquake has happened and the whole earth has shaken under our feet. The earthquake started years ago when stories of child sexual abuse within the church started to surface, continued with the outcome of the royal commission last year, and the story seems to go on. Where is God in all this mess?

Just as God was in Jesus on the cross, and from the cross new life arises, so also in our own faith community, God is with us and will never abandon us. Even if we deny him or run away, like the first disciples did, God does not give up on us but will always reach out to us. There is always a new light that will shine, there is always new life that will spring forth, if we have the courage to stand strong under the cross.

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