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St. John in the Wilderness, Flat Rock, NC
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Good Friday

“Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole; and by his bruises we are healed.”

I once had a conversation with a stranger at a party. We had just met and began exchanging pleasantries. She asked me about my work and so the conversation shifted to matters of faith. She mentioned that she had been attending a church a while back but that she found the culture of it to be not only shallow but to not reflect her reality. This young woman had tragically lost both of her parents. She had been through a great deal and was still living in grief. At the church she had been attending, she found that everyone was pretending to be happy and “blessed” all the time. Sometimes she did not feel happy and she certainly had not felt very blessed of late. Indeed, we were speaking of things too precious for such a casual get-together.

I took a moment, once this young woman had opened her soul to me, to tell her about and invite her to a Good Friday service which was nearing on the calendar. The liberating thing about Good Friday, I told her, is that you just show up with all of your grief. Bring all of your heartbreak, your despair, your anger, your infirmities, your transgressions to the foot of the cross and there look upon Jesus. See him suffering and dying. See him dead. And know that God is with you completely in this tragic human experience that we are all surviving.

In a year when we have been pushed around side to side and up and down by so many things, when we have known frustration, when we have known so much death and dying, today we look upon God who suffers with us and for us. You can bring your grief here. Bring your failures. Bring the violence of your heart. Bring all of your brokenness to this dark and solemn liturgy when the extent of God’s solidarity with creation is bleeding before us. We are so quick in our society to sweep difficulties under the rug. We like to sugar coat death, abuse, and illness as some kind of embarrassment. But God doesn’t do that. God does not sugar coat our hardships and pain but enters into it in Jesus Christ. *If you have ever wept, if you have ever cried out, if you have ever been so broken that you could not go on, then Good Friday is for you.*

Now, there is one other thing that I wish was not necessary to say but it definitely is and here it is: the brokenness we bring to the foot of the cross today is not abstract; it is not passive. We are wounded and hurt people, yes. But also, hurt people... hurt people. Jesus suffering and death is something we are complicit in. We like to talk about our common humanity being linked to good

things. We say things like “the human family,” or “we all smile in the same language,” but also today we have before us the uncomfortable truth that our common humanity is linked to the very worst of us also.

When God showed up filled with love and grace, we nailed him to the cross. It was our good deeds that did this. Our attempts to preserve religion, trying to preserve the state, trying to preserve the social structure and the status quo -- in our attempt to preserve ourselves we will kill the one truly good thing that has come into the world. We can't bear the pain of our own sin so we always put it on other people but God -- knowing that -- steps into the line of fire in Jesus Christ and takes on our violence, our hurts, our hatred. It kills him.

Today we weep -- honestly -- because of the grief of our lives and then we look on in horror to see what we have done in our despair.