

KGL+
Sermon
Trinity Church Boston
Year B, Good Friday
March 29, 2024

My parents wrote a note for me each Good Friday, allowing me to leave school at 11:45am to attend our local church service just a few blocks away. My friends would suggest how lucky I was to get away with missing classes, with not just a hint of envy. Also missing the lunch block that day, I would walk to our local deli, and get an iced coffee and bagel to eat on my way to service. On a spring Friday at noon, the deli was overflowing, loud and crowded. I would arrive a crucial three minutes after the start of the worship, slurping the last of my coffee while sitting on the stone bench outside the church, overlooking the Central Park reservoir and the budding apple blossoms flanking the bridle path, replete with joggers enjoying the spring sun on their runs.¹

Moving from that light, the cool dark stillness always jarred me as I entered the church. The city cacophony outside wasn't fully muted inside the church, but existed as a low hum, a kind of chanted drone which walked us through those last few hours of Jesus' life. The hydraulics of the city busses opening and closing their doors, hissing and clamping, joined our shouts to "Crucify him!" Tourists would wander in and wander out as we stood at Golgotha. Sirens blared as the tomb was sealed.

Upon leaving the church that afternoon—after witnessing the interrogation, torture and death of a man we loved—even if we did believe we knew the end of the story which was waiting to be told on Sunday—upon emerging into the sun and air of the world which continued on while Jesus hung on the cross, and died, it was hard to reconcile the life of the outside with the death which occurred inside.

I would walk home from church in silence, and people would still be buying shoes; still in line at the local deli; stretching by the lamppost after their pre-marathon jog around the reservoir. It was just another Friday.

That same sense happens when one leaves a loved one's side in the hospital, and people are still buying groceries, and you watch them take such great care to load them into their trunks. Or upon leaving a funeral service, and you notice through the windows that people are still at work in their offices, still trading, still negotiating, buying and selling. When the TV news station reports horrific atrocities, and then moves blithely to the morning traffic report. When the

¹ Everyone has 'their' church growing up—it never quite leaves us as the imprint of what a church is, or could be, or should be. Even after serving a dozen parishes, the cool stone of that outside bench is marked in my memory. You can see it here in this photo, on the left side: <https://landmarkbranding.com/2436-2/> The entrance to the church is across from a large entrance to Central Park, where joggers, cyclists and horseback riders would all pass by.

diagnosis is given, the trust broken, the words ‘it is finished’ are said, or left unsaid, and we emerge to find that our particular world ending affects no one but ourselves. It’s the annoyance we secretly feel when we have to stop for a funeral procession of cars, and they are going too slowly, and we have things to do and places to be and wonder if we can just ‘cut through right there’. It’s the annoyance we secretly feel as we drive in a funeral procession and cars and their drivers don’t seem to care that your heart is broken.

Theologian Walter Brueggeman calls Psalm 22 a psalm of ‘disorientation’: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”² That which we believed constant; that which we held dear; that upon which we relied, breaks down today, and yet the world around us does not crumble as we want it to, as we expect it to, even as we need it to. No, the world keeps revolving, first while the psalmist, and then Jesus, centuries later, cries out to the God who has left him alone on the cross. The Palm Sunday throngs are gone. The colt he entered into Jerusalem on, hopefully already returned to its rightful owner. Peter, who has claimed Jesus as the Messiah at the Transfiguration is now refuting their friendship to servant girls and strangers. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.

Padraig O’Tuama, a poet, storyteller and Director of the Corrymeela Community in Northern Ireland, a community of reconciliation, tells this story:

It was very late on a Tuesday night, and the reason I was walking around this city was because just a few hours earlier I had heard from my mother. This was in Australia, and my mother had phoned from Ireland to say that my childhood best friend was dead, dead from suicide, and that I wouldn’t be able to get home in time to make the funeral. And so I did the only thing I knew how to do, walk, walked 8km into the city.... I continued walking around and somebody came up to me on the street and asked me if I knew Jesus Christ of Nazareth and I almost told them what I wanted to say. Nothing worked, in this strange world where friends are dead and you have no answers to things. And you have no capacity to feeling held; and lost doesn’t seem temporary, it seems yawning, possibly permanent...

*And there was I, lost in this city still, foreign, in a world which was suddenly unrecognizable. And I was the only one in Australia who knew my dead friend, and nobody there could hear it.*³

At the foot of the cross, where we stand today, we are the only ones in Australia who knew our dead friend, and nobody can hear it.

² Walter Brueggeman, *Praying the Psalms*

³ This story is taken from Padraig O’Tuama’s presentation, ‘The Value of Storytelling’, as part of the Trinity Institute Lectures, 2018. <https://trinitywallstreet.org/videos/trinity-institute-values-action-padraig-o-tuama> When I first encountered this, I listened to it on my phone while in my car and stuck in traffic, without video. Later, when our collaborative Lenten Series was due to watch the presentation, our video capacity failed, and we ended up being 20 people in a parish hall, listening to O’Tuama’s program. I believe it was infinitely better that way—removing the visual, and just listening to his voice and words.

Jesus on the cross disorients us. The notion of a God who is, at one time being killed, and at the same time, who we believe is allowing this monstrosity to happen, is a far cry from the God who gathers the children, who washed our feet, who healed the injured servant's ear. Who created us in God's own image.

Jesus on the cross disorients us. No matter what Jesus had said before, no matter what we as his disciples heard, there is a gulf between him telling us that discipleship would involve a cross, and us comprehending how that would change our lives and break our hearts.

Jesus on the cross disorients us. The world as it should be, the world as it is; humans as they should be, and humans as they are; our lives as they should be, and our lives as they are—our faith as it should be, our faith as it is—the yawning gap between those ends is fixed inexorably on the cross today.

Jesus on the cross disorients us. And by disorienting us, by rendering the familiar unrecognizable, we are forced to cry out for help, to our God, to our creator. An alternate rendering of verse 23 in the psalm reads “You do not hide from the sorrowful/ when they cry out for salvation, you listen.”⁴ The psalmist's disorientation moves back and forth between cries of despair and plea for assurance: God, do not forsake us. God, hear us when we are lost.

And God does.

But God hearing us will not stop our three days in the tomb. God listening to our cry will not stop the cross from happening. God cannot save all, therefore God cannot save one.⁵ God's presence, on that green hill far away for Jesus, in those dark Australian streets for O'Tuama, as you yourselves watch the world move along as you leave this sanctuary and cross and no one else seems to care, here in the lives of each of us who have cried out that we are forsaken and heart-wrenched, even then, God has never left us, and will not leave us. For perhaps it is in this disorientation that our crafted notions of love, fidelity and prayer need breaking in order to find their depth. Find their soul. So that we can allow God to find us once again.

But you, O Lord, do not be far away. O, my help, come quickly to our aid.

Amen.

⁴ Pamela Greenberg, *The Complete Psalms: the book of prayer songs in a new translation*.

⁵ This is a direct quote from Morgan Allen's sermon from 3/17/24 on Theodicy