

This Is The Easter Story

April 1, 2018, Easter Sunday

On Friday night, I was the last to drive out of the church parking lot. Over the years, sharing the traditions of Holy Week with this wonderful parish, I have developed some personal traditions or habits of my own. Following the evening service on Good Friday I have grown accustomed to returning the big wooden Cross back to its location in the front garden. I also lug the big rocks used to balance the cross back to the landing where they sit for the rest of the year until next Maundy Thursday evening.

The sanctuary is dark and it is silent. The universal aura of Good Friday fills the sanctuary. As I carry the rocks, they are a reminder of hard and heavy times. That is what Good Friday is all about, God incarnate, in the hard and heavy times. God bleeds, God suffers, God falls, God dies along with the multitudes in the world.

When I finished returning those stones back to their storage place I turn off the remaining dim lights in the sanctuary. By this time, the sun has fully set and darkness is all around me. It is truly a Good Friday moment. This past Friday I lingered a little longer than usual, amidst the dark but peaceful sanctuary that is our house of worship. I suppose it was like being in Joseph of Arimathea's newly hewn tomb. I was enveloped in darkness and peace.

Finally, I move out of the sanctuary and make my way to the church parking lot where this story began. As I turned the van to the east, the sky was illumined with the blue moon shining radiant before me. It was an early Easter; the rising, radiant lunar vision lifted me from the dark and heavy and hard ethos that is Good Friday and my heart and mind was filled with beauty and light. Life, luminous and light, rising from the dark and heavy tombs of suffering, pain, illness, and even death. This is the Holy Week Story. This is the Christian Gospel. This is the hope of humankind, that our tears will turn to laughter, that our sorrow will become joy, that our failings will become wisdom, and our foolishness will mature.

Being a priest in a parish I am made aware of much illness, sadness, fear, and brokenness. I am acquainted with grief and suffering and death. Our parish prayers are filled with cancer diagnosis, broken hearts and dreams, prayers for loneliness and pain; requests for hope and help. But I have also learned, simply by being aware, that again and again and again, people rise from the dark and heavy and hard times and they learn to live and laugh and be luminous. Their fear becomes faith, their loneliness becomes friendship, their bitterness is softened and forgiveness and love returns to them. And because they have journeyed back from the dark and hard times, they are more divine than they have ever been. Humility becomes them; gratitude fills them; grace illumines them; life is resurrected in them.

This is the Easter story - that God brings forth life from death; forgiveness from bitterness; grace from judgement; kindness from cruelty; healing from the stripes of a whip.

This is the Easter story – that God can bring forth courageous teens inspiring change from the halls of horror and mass murder.

This is the Easter story – that God can raise the dignity and strength of women from the abuse of empowered men.

This is the Easter story – that God can bring the peoples of the world in unity amidst the rise of despotism and nationalism.

This is the Easter story – that God brings together the hearts of person's gay and straight; Muslim and Christian; women and men and transgendered; in spite of religious and cultural preference to divide and exclude and homogenize the diversity and infinite uniqueness that is God's creation.

This is the Easter story – that God gives life and energy and power to those who have been sealed away in a tomb of injustice, discrimination, and hatred.

This is the Easter story – Good Friday always brings Easter Sunday and where ever you are in your life.

Be you a person enveloped in darkness or a person illumined in light – we are all in this Easter story together. And we are all beloved by the God who brings forth life from death.

Amen