

Sermon, Father William J. Albinger

March 21, 2008

Good Friday A 2008

In the Name of Jesus – Scorned, Abused and Crucified. Amen

How does one preach on the Passion according to John? Perhaps simply by accepting the reality of it. This is a story that really happened – this involves real people who do, sadly, some all too real things. So this Good Friday I'd like to focus on the characters involved in this drama.

The Jews

I cringe when I hear that read in John's Gospel. Not because there is anything wrong with Jews – Jesus, the disciples, the High Priest and Scribes, the crowds – almost all the characters here are Jews. Indeed, almost everyone in the entire Bible are Jews. I cringe because of how these words have been twisted by the Church and used to justify appalling and unjust persecution of our brothers and sisters. But I especially cringe because it is all so easy to find scapegoats on whom to pin our own sins and fears and shortcomings.

Jesus

On Sunday he entered Jerusalem through the back end of town, the poor part, to the acclaim of his followers, mostly peasants from Galilee, and some of the poor folk who lived near the East Gate. He rode a donkey into town fully aware of the fate that lay ahead of him. He comes with calm and determination knowing it is his calling. Standing before Annas, the high priest, Jesus stands his ground; he is not intimidated. The police strike him – the first of so many cruel and unjust blows. Jesus stands his

ground; he is not intimidated. Before Pilate, he is silent in the face of uncaring injustice. He offers his body as witness to the world. The Incarnation of faith, hope and love is put to death in the cruelest and most humiliating way possible.

Peter

First, he is full of bravado. Later, Fearful, he resorts to violence. Finally, he cannot even stand up to a question from a slave girl and, so, he disowns Jesus.

Annas and Caiaphas

They are the religious leaders of their times. They have power; they represent the establishment – those who are privileged and rich. They serve at Rome’s sufferance. They oppress the poor to pay bribes to stay in office and to line their own pockets and the pockets of those who support them. They don’t want trouble. Caiaphas, speaking to the establishment, had prophesied that “It is better for you to have one man to die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.” His father-in-law, Annas, now makes that a reality.

Pilate

According to the first century Jewish historian Josephus, he was arrogant, uncaring, contemptuous of non-Romans and ineffectual. If you read John’s account closely, these traits are evident. He humiliates and mocks Jesus to humiliate those over whom he rules. He is later fired for incompetence.

The Crowd

I was brought up to believe that the crowd really loved Jesus but was misled by their leaders to turn against him. The more I read and study and the older I become, I realize that isn’t so. Yes, Jesus had followers: people who had been healed, people

who were able to see something new; people who listened to his teachings and watched what he did; people who came to believe Jesus when he said that not only did things not have to be so bad, but that God actually wanted better and fuller lives for all God's children. But these were a small number. You see, if we actually believe that, then we have to change.

For the most part, the crowd was silent. They kept their heads down and hoped against hope to be spared the worse of the injustice and oppression that was the reality of their lives. They were afraid and they listened to those who fed their fear. Perhaps it *was* better that one innocent man suffer and die.

And so he did.

When I think of the innocents that die daily of violence, ethnic cleansing, hatred, oppression or just plain starvation, I am overwhelmed. When I think of our own High Priests and Pilates, the fear that is spread, the expediency of the status quo and our own silence, I am appalled.

And yet

The more we appreciate in our own lives and world the horrors of Good Friday, the brighter and more wondrous is the manifestation of God's continued love on Easter.

We can call this day Good Friday because we have read the full story. But it wasn't Good Friday that day in Jerusalem. And so, my sisters and brothers, let us join the pain, loss and despair of those earliest followers on that day as we look upon the coldness of the tomb and wait.

Amen.