

John 18:1 - 19:42

Good Friday

March 29, 2024

The Rev. Katherine Bush

“The tomb was nearby, they laid him there.”

Then what? Nothing happens until the women can return to finish the work begun by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. No one in this story is waiting for anything particularly miraculous. They are waiting for the Sabbath to come and go, or perhaps for a threatening knock at the door. Meanwhile, nothing happens.

What happens when nothing happens is that we start telling the story of everything that happened. In the moments and hours that followed, hollowed out as they must have been, they gathered quietly and pieced together what they knew. Who was where, what was said, who did what. And the story fills the emptiness. Who was where? The friends in the garden, the high priest and the governor in their chambers, the soldiers and the women standing near the cross. What was said? “Whom are you looking for?” “What is truth?” “Not this man but Barabbas.” “It is finished.” Who did what? Simon Peter drew his sword. The soldiers wove a crown of thorns. There they crucified him. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths.

We all do this. In the aftermath of the small and big events that make up our lives, we create the story by recreating it with whatever we can remember, adding to the story as we gather with others who remember different pieces. And in the years and millennia that follow, we keep telling and retelling the story. That's why we're here today: to remember who was where, what was said, who did what. To remember, though, to find the story, we have to stop and do nothing, we have to let nothing happen for a while. We have to come to terms a bit with the vacant space, the cleared hours, and bare rooms. And then sift through the silence to find the details we pull from the debris.

This work of finding the story in the stillness will shape us as much as it shapes the story. How we find the story shapes what the story will mean. That's why coming here today matters. We must sit in the awkwardness and untidiness of not knowing - to figure out what we do know. We must feel the discomfort of heartache and let our grief well up, and then see what flotsam is there. We remember what Jesus did and did not do in the face of cruelty. We look for ourselves in the story. We decide what will have meaning and where was God all along. When, or if, we are able to do this, we will be able to tell stories that reflect our grief and our confusion, our anger and our disappointment, our love and our hope.

In those first moments and then in those early years, the story was shaped by fear, no doubt. Who can blame them, in light of the brutal trauma that they all watched? And fearfully pinning the blame on particular people and groups - that fickle disciple, the cowardly Pilate, the plotting Jews - served to inoculate the storytellers. We know now, how telling the story with scapegoats in mind can beget more violence. We surely know how

getting up too soon with fear and anger as our guides will only take us toward more devastation. How we get to the story and how we tell it gives shape both to memory and to our future. Our task is to sit with our grief long enough and with curiosity enough and with compassion enough that we keep it from morphing into cruelty and judgment, instead letting it become a story that opens up our broken hearts.

“The tomb was nearby, they laid him there.”

Now what? We are now the ones sitting in the aftermath when nothing will happen for a little while. And we begin to tell the story all over again. This is the work of Good Friday, to be in the scraped-out, empty place and to stay there for a while, for as long as we can stand it. To let nothing happen next except our work of recalling everything that happened. What do you remember? Who was where, what was said, who did what? What details do you pull from the debris? How do you tell the story? What does it mean?