

“Nearing the Cross”
Stouffville United Church
Sunday, March 25, 2018

Palm Sunday – John 12:12-16

Sometimes I feel small in the world. When I come home from an evening church meeting, park the car and walk across the driveway to the house, I look up at the sky and see the stars overhead, like a giant bowl of blue-black sky and sometimes I look to find my Big Dipper constellation. And I feel small.

We can feel small when we stand beside the ocean. We can feel small when threatened by a blizzard or hurricane force winds. We each know what it means to feel small in this world.

Holy Week can make me feel small, small because of its immense emotional track through the week – days that narrate in scripture the last steps that Jesus walked. Holy Week is intimidating because of how big it is in our Christian story.

And the Passion story begins with a man who shared a final meal with friends, saying, Take, eat. Drink this. And remember me.

Who was betrayed by a kiss of someone who needed silver more than friendship, and then who in his last hours, praying on his knees in a patch of a garden, slumbering friends at his feet, his ears waited for the clang of metal as the soldiers he knew would be coming, found him there.

And then the mockery, and the beatings and the whippings and the trial. And the voices, Crucify him, crucify him, crucify him, ringing in his ears.

And then the awful death, with the sound of hammers with nails and the utter bleakness of that hill as the cross was hoisted up by the strength of men.

This is why I feel so small in Holy Week. I hardly know where to put myself. For I, like Peter, have denied Christ; for I, like his friends in the garden, have fallen asleep in his presence.

How do I approach the cross, how do I see past the cruel death to the blazing love there?

I cannot ‘do’ Holy Week *without* going to this place of death and grief and loss. While I am ‘acquainted with grief’ as the scriptures write, where I’ve been in a place of death and grief and loss, not only with members of my own family, but with members of your families, and with members of this church family, Jesus’ death on the cross is like no other. It is a bitter place.

But there is in this ritual of going to the cross in Holy Week, a meeting of, a running into, a being swept away by the blazing love that is there in the Cross. That even though we die, love lives on.

Holy Week is being on the cusp of what you know and what you don't know. Yes, we know that we will die, but yes, because of the Cross, we know that we will live.

Nadia Bolz Webber, pastor at House for all Sinners and Saints in Denver Colorado, wrote about the Christian Faith in her book, *Pastrix*,

“The Christian faith, while wildly misrepresented in so much of American culture, is really about death and resurrection. It's about how God continues to reach into the graves we dig for ourselves and pull us out, giving us new life, in ways both dramatic and small.”

Yesterday saw ‘March for our Lives’ rallies held across North America, including Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. It was initiated by the teenagers from Stoneman Douglas School in Parkland, Florida because their friends died in the halls and classrooms they studied in together.

I watched the live stream of the Washington DC ‘March for our Lives’ and I listened to their anger, I saw their tears as high school student after another walked up to that podium and poured their lives out for the world to see....

because they had seen the blood pour out of their friends who lay dying on the floor beside them. One student said, ‘They were studying holocaust deaths in their history class and then their friend is lying dead beside them.’

And out of this community where death was an unwanted visitor, these young people are bringing new life, breathing new life into a political system that puts the value of a life at the bottom to reap financial gain at the top.

A colleague of mine wrote on fb, “God is speaking through the prophetic voices of the young people calling for change”. Gun control may not seem like a Holy Week topic, but in Toronto this past week, two innocent people were caught in bullets meant for someone else.

Who says that the dynamics of Holy Week aren't found in our world today.

Palm Sunday is not simply an entry into what must be endured. It reveals the passion of what must be – new life. We see in the cross, a God who chose to become one of us, and in that incarnation, brought God to us, so that we might touch and hear and see God in humanity, in us.

When we look to the Cross, we recognize that Christianity's bedrock is based on the death and the resurrection that this cross symbolizes,

that where there is despair, hope will arrive,

That where there is death, life will triumph,

That where there is hatred, love will save.

Thanks be to God. Amen.