

Good Friday
Year C
John's Passion
April 2, 2010

In the name of One God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

On Monday, two women blew themselves up in Moscow, killing almost 40 people.

On Tuesday, nine people were shot in a drive-by shooting on South Capital Street.

On Wednesday two more bombs killed twelve people in southern Russia.

I always notice these headlines, but I rarely read the details. I can't stomach the violence.

When movies turn violent, I shut my eyes and put my fingers in my ears.

I have never seen the movie that was made about the Passion. I can't bear to watch it.

It is not that I want to live in a world where pain and violence can't touch me or a world in which I am unavailable to those who are hurting.

It is just that I would rather not have to see it.

I spent a year living in a very violent neighborhood in one of the most violent cities on earth. I learned then that there are many people who cannot wake up in the morning and say to themselves: "Today I choose not to confront violence."

During that year of my life, violence was ever present. I longed to go back to the world in which I could choose not to confront violence or its effects.

Now, I live in an environment in which I *can* choose not to confront violence or its effects. I do not have to fear that today I might become a victim of a violent act.

Most of you live in a similar place. We are very privileged in this regard.

The people in southeast Washington would likely trade places with us in an instant. So would the people in Moscow.

These people, like people in Nigeria, the Congo, Burma, and Jerusalem, do not have the ability to choose not to confront violence. It is their reality. They are suffering.

And I choose...daily...not to see their suffering in its entirety. Not too look too deeply into their pain.

Rather, I choose a road marked by self preservation.

I can come up with many reasons why this is for the best.
Why my choices are psychologically healthy.
Why I am okay.

None of my reasoning erases my guilt.
None of my guilt encourages me to choose to look intently at the violence all around me.

It is thus, so very very easy, to identify with Jesus' disciples who scatter - who can't bear to see what will happen to their teacher and friend, who can't bear the senselessness of the violence, who can't fathom its possible necessity.

I can think of a thousand other things I would rather look at....right now...than the cross that is laid before us.
I can think of a thousand other things that I would look at before I would choose to look at something that will conjure up memories of injustice, betrayal, violence and death.

I can much more easily join with the disciples on the road marked by self preservation.

Yet, here we are this evening gathered in this sanctuary, commemorating the very violent death of our Savior Jesus Christ.

In a few moments we will pause to venerate the cross of Christ.

To venerate means to see, worship, revere, desire.

How can I – how can we all – desire, revere and worship such an instrument of death?

This is the tension I have struggled with all week, and the struggle has been made more acute with the news of the day.

There is darkness, despair and violence wherever we look.

Yet we are all here and we are all here to look in one direction.

Somehow, perhaps only by God's grace, we are able to move beyond our fear and disgust at the violence of the crucifixion and come to this place of reverence.

We are here, ready to venerate the cross of Christ.

When we look at the cross, what will we see? What will we remember?

Will we see the violence of the Roman occupation?

Will we see the violence that still grips our own world?

Will we be reminded of the violence that our neighbors have to endure daily?

Will we see only the darkness that permeates our world?

Or will we see the light that shines through it?

During Holy Week, we cover our shining liturgical crosses with black veils.

I wonder, however, whether the perspective we get in the Gospel according to John would suggest doing something different.

I wonder if, instead of a dark veil covering the cross, we might shine a bright light from it.

A light that shines so *brightly* that it can scatter the darkness of the world - the darkness that blankets parts of Moscow, Southeast DC, Jerusalem.

A light that shines so *far* that it can reach all of us who - because of our need for self preservation - can't walk to the heart of the violence of the crucifixion.

A light that shines with power and purpose.

For, to be sure, it is power and purpose we see if we look at the cross through the lens that the Gospel according to John provides.

In this rendition of the Passion, Jesus is in complete control. He exudes power and purpose.

In this rendition of the Gospel story, Jesus is not forsaken by God. He gives his life - for us - freely.

Though our lives are marked by self preservation, His life is marked by self emptying love.

We can only go so far...into the violence of the cross and into its mystery.

But the gift we celebrate today is that we do not have to go there.

Jesus goes for us.

All the way.

With power and purpose.

We come here tonight to show our gratitude for all Jesus has done for us.

And we venerate the cross, to the extent we can, because we have faith:

Faith that in the very heart of the mystery of the cross is *a bright burning love*.

Faith in God's power and purpose.

Faith that in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Faith that He was in the beginning with God.

Faith that all things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.

Faith that what has come into being in him was *life*, and the life was the light of all people.

Faith that the light shines in the darkness

And faith that the darkness did not, does not, and will not overcome it.

Amen.