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Good Friday, John 19:16b-42

4-18-14

It all happened so quickly. Just a few days ago, we were celebrating Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. We shouted "Hosanna"; we waved tree branches; we prepared a way for hope. And now, so soon, we find ourselves here. It all happened so quickly. The shouts of Hosanna, "save us", turned into shouts of "crucify him." The hymns of praise turned into wails of lament. Fear has caused hope to turn into hatred. It just happened so soon.

We all know the story, the story of Jesus' last 24 hours on earth. Some of us have read it before. Some of us hear the story in our faith communities year after year. But all of us, every single one of us, know this story on a deeper level. We live it. We experience first hand the fragility of human life. How quickly our own lives can change from hymns of praise to wails of lament. The stories of Jesus' last days on earth connect intimately to our own stories. Interwoven within the passion narrative is a meta-narrative that points out so plainly what it is to go about this life dwelling as a human. It's not just something that happened, it's something that happens every day.

When we read the passion we are drawn to face the uncomfortable reality of human action and inaction—the risk and vulnerability that comes with living this life. The reality of human life presents itself in many forms, in the gospel text and in our lives. We read of betrayal, deception, broken relationships, failure to help someone in need, physical and emotional hurt, political manipulation, power abuse, quieting

marginalized voices, the mocking of someone in a vulnerable state, boasting, self-hatred, murder—it's all there, in this sacred scripture and in our lives. We may find ourselves revealed in different parts of this story as we go about our lives and if we're honest with one another and ourselves, we might dare to admit not only the times we have felt crucified but also the times in which we have yelled, "crucify!" along with the crowds. This human life is risky, fragile, and so often our experience of this life can bring a suffering that comes from this odd paradox—being crucified while simultaneously crying "crucify". We are not just storytellers of the passion, the passion is our story. In this great narrative of what it is to be human, the divine is intertwined with the ordinary. Through Jesus' divine humanity, fully human- fully God, God's experience comesingles with our own. In the life and death of Jesus, God risks everything to know better our humanity—God weeps, God suffers, God becomes vulnerable.

Through Jesus, God lives the human experience. God on earth touched beauty, felt the joy of relationship, but not only this, through Jesus God lived suffering, pain, death—even death on a cross. In all of our humanity, God knows what it is like—the passion narrative in it's Truth. God has been there. God intimately knows death. Meant to be a symbol of God's departure from this world, the cross instead becomes a symbol of God's unrelenting presence in the world and in our lives. And through the cross, we can be sure that we are never devoid of God's presence. Through Jesus' death on the cross, God is bound to our brokenness—bound to us in our pain. The passion story is our own story, marked with the love of a God who dared to become human.

Yes, God knows our story. But through the cross, the instrument of torture that reveals our own brokenness, God declares to us that the passion narrative is not the end of the story. The hurt in our lives, our own suffering, it's not all we have to offer. We are comforted by God's presence in our suffering—God living the story with us—but we cannot remain immobilized in it. The incarnation, God's presence permeating through and within our lives, bids us not be satisfied with the passion being the end of the story. Instead, the passion is just the beginning.

God within us, our comfort leads us to a call. A call to liberate, to work for justice, to care for one another, to renew our earth, to be agents of love as Jesus loves us—to be sure that death and brokenness does not get the final word in our lives. How might you love when you know the Creator's love for you? How might you go about the holy work of liberation when you know that you too have been set free? As theologian Dorothee Soelle says, "The beauty, the splendor of God is visible in all those who prepare God's way. The messianic work of liberation awaits us. God wants to be reborn within us."

The passion narratives of our lives do not end with a period but with a comma—an open opportunity for new life and transformation within ourselves and in the world. In the gospel story, I am reminded of Joseph and Nicodemus whose holy vocation begins at Jesus' own crucifixion. Joseph of Arimathea was a follower of Jesus, though we are told he followed in secret. After Jesus' death, he risks a safe and quiet life in order to convince Pilot to allow him to take Jesus' body to prepare for burial. Nicodemus first approached Jesus in the darkness of the night. Now, he boldly steps into the light of day, bringing spices and linen. These two men, misfit followers, are

the ones who prepare Jesus for burial. Transformed by the life and death of a man they barely knew, they are led to become servants. They are called out of secrecy and darkness and into a new purpose—the passion narrative is not the end of their story, but the beginning.

What holy vocation are you called to? How will the life and death of Jesus leave you transformed? How might God be reborn within us? Together we are called to take part in the healing, redeeming, liberating salve of Jesus' death on the cross. God's love revealed on the cross calls us to love one another. We are not alone in our own passion narratives, God promises to go along with us on the way, giving us hope for a new tomorrow.