

Palm Sunday  
St. Peter's Glenside  
Year C Luke 22: 14: 23-56  
April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Laura Palmer

What we know and they didn't on that awful Friday afternoon two thousand years ago is that after every Good Friday comes Easter.

What they knew, and we too often forget, is that everyone knew Jesus was innocent. Pilate knew, his wife, told in a dream, knew, the crowd knew, the high priests and Pharisees knew, Judas knew and Peter, the beloved disciple, knew he was lying when he betrayed Jesus three times. Above all, Jesus knew and did nothing to save himself because saving himself meant betraying himself.

Elie Wiesel, Auschwitz survivor and Nobel laureate, said that the difference between Judaism and Christianity is that God did *not* let Abraham murder his son, but God let Jesus die on the cross. Why didn't he save him? It's a question I had to answer to believe in God as a God of love.

God took a risk in giving us free will. I believe God wants us to be co-creators in realizing his kingdom on this earth which we are racing to destroy. To do so, we have to choose, whether to build or tear down, to hate or to love, and those

choices have consequences.

It's been suggested that knowing the capacity for violence in the human heart, God sent his Son, the Prince of Peace, as the only alternative. He came as a servant, not a king who stood with the poor, the victimized, the outcasts, and the sinner. It doesn't sound like it would be a threat to empire but it always is. Martin Luther King, Jr. knew he was not getting to the Promised Land. Was it God's will that his son died? Or the will of those who knew he was innocent and executed him anyway?

I've never quite understood what it means to say Christ died for my sins. No one has ever satisfactorily explained quite how that works. And I'll pass on being "washed in the blood of the lamb." Violence redeems nothing. Only love. It is the life-giving blood of Christ in the Eucharist that sustains me.

A 7 year-old girl with leukemia once asked me: "How *do* you die on the cross?" Unsure of what to say I stumbled through the basics of nails, pain, and blood. We usually prayed together before our visits ended. That day before we did, she blurted out, "Can I say the words?" "Of course," I said, delighted as I reached for her hand.

“Dear Jesus. Thank you for killing yourself so we could be good.”

Is this really what we want children to believe? Is this the message of the cross and Good Friday?

The Palm Sunday liturgy is an invitation to an execution. I’ve never joined in the chorus of “Crucify him.” It’s too disturbing. Hitler’s evil depended on those who looked the other way and stayed silent. I never understood how that could happen; nor the haunting black and white photographs of the crowds that gathered for a lynching as if it were a picnic and not an execution. How could they stand and watch? With their children?

I’ve come to understand more now than I ever did before about mass hysteria and the manipulation of hate when I hear crowds chant “Jews will not replace us.” For several decades I was a journalist. Some now would call me an “Enemy of the People.”

These are dark and difficult times. We have to choose. The crowds screaming “Hosannas” wanted a king and here comes Jesus on a donkey— no army, no

chariots, no swords, no shields, nothing more threatening than a heart of love but it was enough for a crowd lusting for vengeance to execute him.

Christianity is the only faith that worships a God who suffers with us, notes Episcopal priest, Barbara Brown Taylor. This life will crucify all of us at some point.

Yet whatever the cross we bear, the promise of our faith is that Jesus is right there, on the cross beside us. Death is not the end because after every Good Friday comes Easter. We will rejoice in that next Sunday as the triumph at the heart of our faith. But then we have 364 days to make Easter really matter

The invitation is there. The choice is ours.

AMEN