

Pastor Roy's Sermon from March 25, 2012

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me challenge you to remember and practice something during this last week of Lent as we come to Palm/Passion Sunday and Holy Week. Remember we are the body of Christ. If we allow ourselves to be the body of Christ--and this does take some energy on our part, if we are mindful that we are the body of Christ, then what happens to Jesus also happens to us. What Jesus says, we say.

These weeks are more than personal salvation—a benefit for us—a gift for us from Jesus. Personally, I don't believe Jesus willingly gave up his life to save us from the devil *or* an angry God. He let his life go because that's what love does. He acted on his desire to be faithfulness rather than his concern for the consequences. We are sorely tempted to be more concerned about consequences than about faithfulness. Jesus was faithful to his friends and the poor who followed him. He proclaims a Gospel of love even with his death.

He proclaims a God who welcomes all who are willing to take a good hard look at themselves with simple honesty and walk in the direction of love. Whatever love does, Jesus does, and so he calls us. Simplicity. He said, “When I am lifted up, I will draw all people to myself.” As he says this, he must be thinking about what it might feel like to suffer and die--surely not absolutely knowing what was on the other side.

“Now my soul is troubled” is not the language of certainty. It's the language of passion. “My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?--forsaken me? This is not a tidy, antiseptic plan for salvation. This is the passion of a living love which goes to the very edge. This is the life and death of a man who loved profoundly. This is the language of someone who has chosen to be faithful and will be faithful to the end, regardless of the consequences.

Surely he had no doubt that this was the path of love, but would it make any difference? Yes, he was dying under and for the sins of the world, but would anybody know? Would his closest friends continue to carry out his Gospel mission? Would they also resist the religious establishment which had more to do with quieting the masses and holding onto power and privilege? Would they love God and neighbor with all their heart, soul, and mind rather than seek power and privilege? Would they also give their lives for love?

Or would the movement fall apart and come to nothing, successfully snuffed out again by the powerfully comfortable. Would they go back to *surviving*, holding onto their lives at all cost as if that was actually the goal of life. Might this be the trouble of Jesus' soul? I like to think it was this rather than that Jesus was anxious of being beaten and possibly suffocating naked on a cross.

We love certainty and we flee from insecurity, even if that instinct pushes us into untruths and to be out of touch with reality. But let's sit with Jesus in this feeling of abandonment, with a troubled soul.

Sometimes we forget that Jesus was a man just like you and I are male or female—human. We see him vindicated by God in his bodily resurrection from the dead. But I *don't* believe Jesus had special insight into reality or into his own future, any more than any of the rest of us do. Some believe that he did...but I find that believing that Jesus was so different pushes him yet further away and makes him harder to relate to and experience today. The church has always clung to Jesus' humanity.

Some New Testament passages seem to suggest that Jesus was more God than man. But these passages could also be the influence of Jesus' dear friends who assumed that such a powerful God presence. . .as Jesus. . .must surely have been more holy and Godly than one of us.

Many religious groups in Jesus' day proclaimed salvation for their followers. That was the language of the day. Jesus proclaimed life which comes through love. Over and over he proclaims, as in today's gospel lesson, that those who part with their lives, who lose their lives, who aren't obsessed with staying alive and doing their own will, have already found eternal life. These have found the life of the ages. True life. Life worth living. Life even worth dying for—with Jesus.

By such a death will Jesus draw all people to himself. And those who are drawn to Jesus will be drawn into unity together as well—John 17. United as the body of Christ. That which Jesus is, he calls us to be. That which Jesus does, he calls us to do. We are the body of Christ. That is why communion is such a vital part of our weekly worship. It reminds us over and over again, that we take in the body and blood of our Lord. That of which we partake, we are. This is a radical thought, but fully in line with Jesus' teachings and that of the apostles.

So remember this--this week and next. You are the body of Christ. What happens to Jesus, happens to you and me. In Spirit and body we are free to live as Jesus lived—in love, by love, for love, and with love. . .Thanks be to God. Amen.

[Hebrews speaks of submission and obedience. These are good words when they speak of love—of a loving God—of loving sisters and brothers, family members and spouses. Of course, submission and obedience are dangerous words when applied to persons who know nothing of love which gives its life for its friends. Submission and obedience in that case is the language of domestic violence and coercion, of powerlessness. Unlike coercive submission, we submit to God because we are safe with God. We submit to one another because together, led by the Spirit, we are safe in love. True submission is mutual and leads us into freedom.]