

*Who is Jesus? And, what has he done for us, and the whole world?*

Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday set these two questions front and center for us. “Who is Jesus?” and, “What has he done for us, and the whole world?”

Each of the four gospel writers has his own way of answering these two questions. Matthew, Mark, and Luke have similarities in their telling of the story that helps answer these questions. The gospel of John, written later than the other three sits on a quite distinct and separate plane, all by itself. Not better or worse than the others, but definitely different. Mystical. Confident. Courageous. Triumphant. Catching up the whole Created Cosmos in its answers.

Those powerful and deeply treasured “I AM” statements attributed to Jesus are woven throughout the gospel of John. “I am the Bread of Life – come down from heaven for the life of the world.” “I am the Good Shepherd – I know my sheep and my sheep know me”. “I am the Vine – you are the branches”. “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.”

These questions – “Who is Jesus?” and, “What has he done for us and the whole world?” are provocative and deeply theological and spiritual questions. Is Jesus a King? A prophet? A silent victim? A triumphant victor? A Savior? A friend?

As we have heard John’s version of the Passion story today, I think it’s faithful to John’s intent to imagine Jesus as an open door. An open door through which we first are invited to contemplate failure, loss, and sorrow. The disciples’, our own, and the failure, loss, and sorrow that is present in all of humanity. The second invitation is to pray for the world and meditate on the cross. We take the time today to bow humbly at the foot of the cross, the instrument of Jesus’ death. An instrument of fear, pain, torture, violence, and destruction. The cross is a hallmark of the very worst things human beings can do to each other. The shadows of evil that sick systems of power perpetuate lurk there. Jesus died for political reasons. Jesus was put to death to maintain the status quo of the empire in power. His crime was being a revolutionary, an insurrectionist, at worst a potential rival king.

And Jesus died because of human sin. Standing there at the cross, we can see our own selves more fully. In truth and humility, through the cross's work we recognize our powerlessness over forces that oppose the will of God for justice and mercy. We are faced with the reality of our absolute need for a Savior to deliver us, to free us, to pardon and restore us to the Holy One who first loved us and loves us still, and will forever. We accept that in Jesus, God heals and cleanses us. God reveals and uncovers in us once again the image of the God in whose likeness we are made.

Today in our contemplating Jesus and the cross, we crack open the door to glimpse the beauty of a death so sacrificial, so self-emptying, so giving that it makes us weep in horror, sorrow, and gratitude all at once.

Jesus and the cross help us see God's bigger picture of which we are a part. Good Friday raises issues of life and death, guilt and forgiveness, of what it means to be creatures made in the image of God. Good Friday lays out for us the complexity and mystery of who Jesus is and the biblical witness to him.

In John's gospel, Jesus does not answer Pilate's question, "What is truth?" John's unspoken answer is that *Truth is a person*, not a set of propositions to be debated, dismissed, believed or disbelieved. *Truth* lives for John in the person and work of Jesus, the capital W "Word" of God. The same Word that spoke creation into being in Genesis. John's gospel starts, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." If John had written an answer to Pilate's question, he might have written, "In the beginning was Truth. The Truth was with God and the Truth was God."

Pilate wouldn't and couldn't, and we don't find Truth without being pointed back to God. Jesus is the embodiment of God's relentless love for the world. Love that longs to save and restore and heal and make new. Love that leads not only to life, but to abundant life – *now* – and in the world to come. Jesus is God's eternal "*NOW*". Jesus is God's forever "*YES*". Jesus is the pure essence of God's heart, God's character and nature in human form. God come to be with us and for us always.

It's painful and heartbreaking to rest in the presence of that battered and broken body of Truth today. We need these hours of waiting with all those who claim Jesus as Truth. All who wonder, all who have never heard or met him. All who doubt and wander aimlessly through life. All those who face pain, suffering, abuse, indignity. We need a time of prayer for ourselves and the world. A time to offer up our heartbreak and ask for greater and deeper healing – for ourselves and the world. We need this time of waiting in the grief and darkness, watching for that first glimmer of light which will bring the dawn of a new day. The day when the light of Love shines forth from an empty tomb, radiant and made complete in Resurrection.

While we wait, we pray. In the darkness. In faith. In trust. In hope. In community. Our hope is fixed, is anchored in God's Word, God's work, God's truth in the person of Jesus. We wait and pray, pray and wait, just as we did in the season of Advent. God's story is not yet finished. The Spirit of the Risen One, wounded for our transgressions and acquainted with all our griefs has much to show and teach us still. Let us wait then, held firmly in the grip of God's amazing grace.