

**Wesley United Methodist Church**

April 18, 2014

Good Friday

"O Sacred Head..."

John 18:1-19:42

As we gather this Good Friday, it is appropriate for us to focus on the cross, and particularly on the one who hung there. To help us do that, we will use that most solemn hymn, "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded." I invite you to meditate on each phrase that I will share with you. The song is also found on page #286 in the hymnal. Let the words and their meanings penetrate to the deeper parts of our lives and allow them to speak meaningfully to us. Listen, feel, experience the hymn anew this day as it points us to that cross and the One who hung there for us.

**O Sacred Head, now wounded,**

His head was indeed sacred. We know that. We confess Sunday after Sunday that he was God's Son, but "sacred" means set apart--that which is intended for a holy purpose. So, it wasn't just that he was God's Son; he was God's Son who came with a purpose to his people. And surprisingly enough, amazingly enough, it was a cross, an instrument of torture, that made that head sacred. Here was the fulfillment of God's great plan of salvation. Here at the cross--a head bleeding, wounded, sacred, because now, in God's mysterious way, he would fulfill that for which he had been created. But, it is hard to understand that, isn't it? With the sky turning black, and the hopes of a people dashed like fragile glass, it is hard to comprehend the sacredness of the wounds. Until...until we know, not just with our heads, but with our hearts and souls as well, that those are his sacrifice, his love-gift for us.

**With grief and shame weighed down,**

Do you remember how he stood outside Jerusalem and with great emotion cried out, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered you to me as a hen does her chicks, but you would not?" We understand something of that kind of grief. It is the grief of a parent for a lost child, or for a prodigal that has yet to come to him/herself, or for love given to those we have helped to bring into the world that goes unreturned. Grief so intense, that the very heart is torn in two. But what of this shame? It did not belong to him, but to all those who put him on the cross; to all those who could not look him in the eye as he hung there; to all those who refused to believe that he really was who he said he was; to all those who could not grasp the meaning of his new kingdom he preached; to all those who thought it was over. The shame is ours and even that he took with him to bury in the grave.

**Now scornfully surrounded With Thorns thine only crown:**

They thought to make fun of him, dressing him in a purple robe, placing a crown of thorns on his head. There was no angel chorus singing, "King of kings and Lord of lords;" no one to proclaim him the Prince of Peace. And yet, the centurion looked on his lifeless form and said, "Surely this was the Son of God." they looked for an earthly king who would solve all their problems. Instead, he told them, "I have come to live your problems, to give you the strength to cope, and I will solve the only problem that really counts, where you stand with your Father in heaven." Now, I ask you, what kind of King is that?

**O sacred head, what glory, What bliss till now was thine! Yet, though despised and gory, I joy to call thee mine.**

It is easy to follow this Jesus during the good days. The healings, the teachings, on the hillsides, the wonderful stories he would tell. We loved them. We loved him. He said we were to go out and tell the good news that God's kingdom had come. It was great. We believed him. We

believed in him. Now, look at where he has led. The joy of anticipation has led to the sorrow of defeat, or so it seems. But it is hard for us to stay sorrowful, because we know the story doesn't end here. We know what's ahead--a real victory, a real joy. But don't you see? This is part of our problem. We want to jump there and avoid this scene before us. We don't really understand why this has to be. We don't want to think about crosses and sacrifice and atonement for sin because...because maybe we will have to carry one sometime; maybe God will call us to sacrifice; maybe to follow Jesus means this.

**How pale thou art with anguish, With sore abuse and scorn!**

Have you ever looked into the face of someone in great pain? The face indeed, becomes pale. But any pain we have ever experienced is nothing compared to the cross, a pain that was not just from the nails, the thorns, the beatings, the suffocation, but also from the rejection of those he came to save, the desertion of those who were closest to him, the ridicule of those who claimed to be closest to God. "Pale" is not a strong enough word. He looked like death. He became death for us.

**How does that visage languish Which once was bright as morn!**

It was his eyes. In all the representations of Jesus I have ever seen, from paintings to movies, it was his eyes that always fascinated me. Whether they really were like we picture them, we will never know. But we do know that people we know who are alive, and spirited, and exciting, have those kind of eyes. I picture Jesus with a twinkle in his when he taught his disciples, a twinkle of love and joy; I picture those eyes laughing when surrounded by children. I see them on fire when confronting the Pharisees and Sadducees. Did the light, the joy, the fire go out while he hung on that cross? Could any life show through such agony? Some have said that the last word he spoke, "It is finished," was not the last gasp of a dying man, but the triumphant shout of one who had overcome. Surely the eyes twinkled with a secret we could not know for three days.

**The grief and bitter Passion were all for sinners' gain; Mine, mine was the transgression, But thine the deadly pain.**

They don't say much about crucifixion in the scriptures. Those people knew what it meant to die on a cross; we can only imagine. No one who studied crucifixion can ever really be the same. Isaac Watts would write: "See from his head, his hands, his feet; sorrow and love flow mingled down." Those are poetic and descriptive of Christ's work for us, but in plain English, Jesus bled. Real blood. Just a day earlier he told his disciples: "This is my body which is broken for you; this is my blood which was shed for you." Did they know at the time what he was talking about? Do we really know? "He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquity" means that he took on punishment that rightfully belonged to me, to you. I don't ever remember once being punished for something I didn't do without making a fuss about it. Jesus only said, "Father, forgive them."

**What language shall I borrow to thank thee, dearest friend, for this thy dying sorrow, thy pity without end?**

There is only one language that can begin to express true and proper thanks, the language of the obedient life. So many of our great hymns express the thought of being absolutely and completely Christ's. He even said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." How many times have we asked God to reveal his will to us and at the same time were thinking of a million reasons why we shouldn't, couldn't do what God revealed to us?

**Oh, make me thine forever, and should I fainting be, Lord, let me never, never outlive my love for thee.**

I used to think that walking with Jesus was an easy journey. After all, I have known no other kind of walk all my life. But the older I get and the more complicated life becomes, I know that walk is not like any normal walk through life. It involves a cross; it means living with the burden of my sisters and brothers on this planet; it means living a different kind of life than the world would lead me into. But for those who take this journey with Jesus, it is a journey of discovery. We discover that happiness cannot be made or bought. We discover that peace is a gift. We discover that life holds wonder and love and joy...because the journey doesn't end at the cross. We don't like to stop here very long. But we must, for only by that cross, can we know forgiveness and restoration and renewal and grace. Lord, let us never, never outlive our love for thee. Amen.