

Good Friday

Tonight, for the second time this week, we read as a congregation the passion of our Lord according to St. John.

What surprised me, and what may surprise you, is that for St. John, the glory of Jesus is not what happens Easter morning, for St. John, the glory of Jesus is what has just happened: the glory of Jesus is his death.

“When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all to myself.” Jn. 12:32

Not only all men, not even all people, but all things.

In an earlier part of John’s gospel, we learn that God so loved the world, that he gives his only begotten son not to condemn the world, but to save it.

Except, in the original Greek, the word isn’t “world,” it’s “cosmos,” meaning all that exists in the entire universe.

In death, Jesus begins the story of creation anew and it is in this fact that the scandal of our faith is born.

You see, a respectable God would slap our heads, knock us down, or do what it takes to make everyone shape up.

Instead, we get Jesus, who points to prodigal sons and unjust stewards and corrupt judges and says: “This is what God’s like!”

He forgives before being asked, he excuses the awfulest things, and instead of whipping us into shape, he hangs, bloodied and heavy on the cross, looking down on the whole sorry mess we’ve created in our self-justification, our endless schemes to measure up, our countless efforts to be on top; to win at the game of life – and this ridiculous God looks us over and says ever so simply: “Forgive them.”

It turns out that real strength is found only in weakness, that surrender is the key to victory, that forgiveness cures revenge, that real life can be reached only by giving oneself over to death.

That St. John points to tonight as the lodestar of God’s glory, as the centerpiece of our faith, is as stunning as it is for all the world ridiculous.

We all know that weakness only invites attack.

We all know that surrender is something only cowards do.

We all know that death, as the last word on life, is to be avoided at all costs.

Yet, there is Jesus, hanging from the tree, and in the hanging there, demonstrates the very glory of God.

We cannot explain it.

We struggle to accept it.

Perhaps this night, we can only be quiet and wonder, and yes, perhaps even tremble.

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