

April 2, 2017
Human Responses to the Crucifixion
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Luke 23:33-49

But all his acquaintances, including the women who followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things. This is the story of the end of the life of Jesus. We are in the fifth week of lent, our fifth week looking at what happened to Jesus during his last days in the city of Jerusalem. He arrived in town with a theatrical procession, riding on a donkey. He overturned tables in the temple. He was anointed by the woman with tears and expensive oil. He had a supper with all his disciples, including Judas. He went to pray in the garden, urging his disciples to stay with him, and encouraging and reassuring them even though it would be difficult and they would all desert him. He reminded them that they are beloved, known and loved by him. Even Judas.

Last week's story ended with him being arrested, then all the disciples "cut and ran". After the arrest, Jesus was tried and crucified. His acquaintances stood at a distance, watching these things.

How do we watch something as difficult as a crucifixion? It's challenging. As humans we have so many responses to watching. From the story we know that one response is to run away, to deny our connection, to look away, to retreat to Galilee where we think we might be safe. And for those of us who stay to watch, how do we respond? Sadness? Anger? Frustration? Disappointment? Things went wrong. Who do we blame? How do we repair relationships from here?

This morning I am looking at our human reactions to the suffering of Jesus. And I am taking the perspective of the crowd on the hill, not the intense pain of Jesus mother, standing at his feet, watching her son die. And over the past 2000 years there has been a lot of theology which takes into account the events that followed the crucifixion. And that, too,

is part of how we understand suffering. This morning I am focusing on our human responses to human situations.

Loretta Brady a social worker who teaches the enneagram, suggests 9 reactions. You don't need to know anything about the Enneagram to decide if any of these reactions resonate for you. If you know a little about the enneagram, you're not surprised that there are 9 reactions. to observing the events surrounding the crucifixion based on our core fears.

1) It's all so broken. The body is broken. The followers are scattered. Why couldn't Jesus hold it all together?

2) Jesus is so needy. Why is he totally helpless? How did he get here?

3) Jesus should have accomplished something. Why is he such a failure? Are we all failures? Was this whole movement a failure?

4) Jesus death is so ordinary, a common revolutionary. Wasn't he supposed to be special?

5) It looks like Jesus didn't know anything. It was dumb to get arrested. Couldn't he have left town. Wasn't he smarter than this?

6) Doubt about Jesus. Yesterday he was the son of God. Today he's dead. What happened?

7) The desire to avoid all the pain. The flogging, the thorns, the piercing of his side, the suffocation. So much pain. Couldn't he have avoided that?

8) Jesus is so weak. I thought I was following someone who was powerful. He looks like an ordinary guy there. Where's his power?

9) All the disagreement! So many different people, mocking him or accepting him, running away or denying him. Ack, so many people with different opinions. Can't someone get consensus?

Any of these feelings might crop up for us. These are our individual responses and reactions, our questions and pain. But for those who ran away, they went seeking others. And those who looked away, looked to others. And those who stayed to watch, were not watching alone, but

with the crowd, including the women who had followed Jesus from Galilee.

And when I review the stories of this last week of Jesus, I see a web of connection that's bigger than just his followers.

When Jesus entered into Jerusalem, he sent his disciples to go find a man carrying water and ask for his donkey. I presume that Jesus knew someone, or one of his followers knew someone to ask. After all, every year many people came into Jerusalem from the countryside for Passover. So somehow, maybe from a previous encounter, or a network of relatives, the water carrier, the owner, and the donkey were part of the network around Jesus.

When Jesus was weeping over Jerusalem, I imagine him remembering the whole community of Israel.

When the woman came to anoint Jesus with tears and perfume, we don't know who she was. And the person who had the room for the last supper, who were they? The network of beloved friends was bigger than what we see.

And in a sentence in Mark, after the arrest, and before the trial, there is one man who runs away. Who was that? If you're curious you'll have to go look it up? He ran away naked from the garden.

And at the crucifixion there was a crowd on the hill. People from Jerusalem, people from Galilee. People from the broad network of the community loved by Jesus. Even in the crucifixion, the writers stretch out to include one of the other men in the community of Jesus. Jesus has woven a thick web of beloved community.

In our story last week, Louise mentioned Jesus encouragement and trust in all his followers, encouraging them for the challenge of this day, this moment, when all might seem broken, forsaken, lost, and alone. But the crowd is watching.

When I think about situations today, or this week, or this year, or this political season, or at this time in the Mennonite Church, or at this time in the world, I don't know where to start with bringing our story into this story. But the story of this week that most catches my attention is the

story of MJ Sharp who was working as an expert for the United Nations in Congo, investigating war crimes with a team. His was kidnapped a few weeks ago and his body was found this week. MJ has relatives here in our congregation, so I wish to be gentle and appropriate with this story by looking a bit at MJ's web of beloved community. Most of us watch from the hillside, but some of us are much closer, looking on, seeing the pain.

This week in my newsfeed I read stories of MJ from high school, from Eastern Mennonite University, from his connection to Mennonite Central Committee, and Christian Peacemaker Teams. I saw news articles from the UN and Albuquerque, NPR, Huffington Post, Hesston and Harrisonburg.

And this week it's not just this story of MJ. Everyone sitting here can think of someone this week who you remember, someone who is gone, someone who's circumstance was not just. Several people this week told me the story of MJ reminded them of Glen Lapp. And we Running away, turning away, looking on, having questions. These are the things people do. And turning to others, telling the story, and remembering the details, this is also what we do. Naomi Leapheart, a few weeks ago called out names, asking us to remember some who died unjustly. And Jesus, in the meal, asked his friends to remember him.

The web of connection around the world now includes more than 7 billion people, and many other beings. We cannot look directly at every place of pain and challenge for all 7 billion. While I heard this week about gun violence in Chicago, a landslide in Colombia, and events here in Lancaster, I didn't really stop to look at any of them.

Here, in this sanctuary, we are a subset of the web. Here. Us. Together. And each of us, me, you, the person beside you, are part of other webs; our families, our friends, all our relations. So if in, your smaller set of connection you have felt a ripple of injustice, pain, or sadness of the world, what should you do?

The stories from this week had me asking myself, "Am I following my call as best I can?" We are not all called to ride into Jerusalem,

overturn tables, and face trial and crucifixion. We are not all called to help people in war zones. But you are called to something. Are you doing that? The crucifixion was one of the likely outcomes when Jesus challenged the existing situation with a message for justice. Not everyone who works for justice is crucified.

Notice how you are already living in your call. And listen for the nudge, or the urge, or the desire to reach for a new connection or a stronger connection within your network, within your community, or the urge to reach out with hospitality. You are known and loved by god. You are beloved. This week, how can you show that in the world?