

## 2020 04 10 Good Friday Homily: The Passion According to St. John Ralph Carl Wushke

### SERMON

Of the many powerful moments in the Gospel, one leapt out at me this year: early in the trial Jesus says to the High Priest: “If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?”

His question is met with silence, because with these words Jesus convicts his accusers. They have no answer for him. Have you ever been in a position where you felt unjustly accused of something, and your only defense was the truth? I know I have. It wasn't easy.

This interaction reflects the essence of Jesus' power and control in John Gospel: he leads the trial as it proceeds to its inexorable end, saying, “For this was I born, for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth...” Pilate's rhetorical response, “What is truth?” convicts himself and all Jesus' accusers, because the very one who is the Truth stands before him. Remember earlier in this Gospel Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life.”

Later in response to that prying question, cast into the face of every new Canadian, “Where are you from?” Jesus almost eggs Pilate on to do what needs to be done to fulfil God's intention: “You would have no power over me, unless it had been given you from above.” Jesus effectively says, “try as you will, you cannot avoid your fate, which is to be on the wrong side of this trial, but ironically, on the right side of history. In playing your role, you allow God to complete God's purpose, that through this self-giving act of the Word made Flesh all God's love will be poured into the world.

American hymnwriter Carl Daw's text, Dare to Call it Good – for this is after all Good Friday - captures this paradox:

The hands that formed us from the soil are nailed upon the cross.  
The Word that gave us life and breath expires in utter loss.  
Yet deep within this darkness lives a Love so fierce and free,

that arcs all voids and risk supreme! embraces agony.  
Its perfect testament is etched in iron, blood, and wood.  
With awe we glimpse its true import and dare to call it good.

As yet another Carl, Carl Jung wrote: “Oddly enough the paradox is one of our most valuable spiritual possessions, while uniformity of meaning is a sign of weakness. Hence, a religion becomes inwardly impoverished when it loses or waters down its paradoxes; but their multiplication enriches because only the paradox come anywhere near to comprehending the fullness of life.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer who was executed exactly 75 years ago yesterday, understood this better than almost anyone, as we were reminded in the daily readings from the Moravian Brethren today:

“In order to recognize what God promises, and what God fulfills, we must immerse ourselves again and again, very long and very peacefully into the life, ways, suffering and death of Jesus. It is certain that suffering conceals our joy, and death our life. It is certain that in all this, we all stand in a community that carries us.”

Die Wörter Dietrich Bonhoeffers aus Die Herrnhüter Losungen heute stellen sein tiefes Verständnis dieser Wahrheit dar:

“Wir müssen immer wieder sehr lange und sehr ruhig in das Leben, Handeln, Leiden, und Sterben Jesu versenken, um zu erkennen, was Gott verheißt und was er erfüllt. Gewiss ist, dass im Leiden unsere Freude, im Sterben unser Leben verborgen ist; gewiss ist, dass wir in dem allen in eine Gemeinschaft stehen, die uns trägt.“

There is an almost ironic overlap between the passion and today’s context: in Latin languages – Spanish, Italian, French – Jesus’ Crown of Thorn is La corone, the **corona** – a word all too familiar – because a microscopic virus has a corona – a a crown-like ring of particles by which it attaches to the human body – on a path of destruction.

It could be said, at this moment that whole world is wearing a deadly crown – the unwanted CORONA19. In that almost absurd coincidence, can we hear again Jesus’ words, “for this was I born, for this I came into the world”? – to transform and surround the dying and the fearful, the exhausted and the angry with a selfless love, a consoling love, a healing love? When familiar ways and means we depended on disappear, we are left asking a version of Pilate’s question: “What is security?” Our story is that ultimate security is God’s love, streaming from the cross, and we’re sticking to it.

Paul Gerhardt’s hymn which we will hear in a moment captures the paradoxical goodness of the cross: faith receives Christ’s offering with a joy, a joy that will sustain until – and beyond - death.

Yet, though despised and gory,  
I joy to call thee mine.

and should I fainting be,  
Lord, let me never, never  
outlive my love to thee.

Jetzt aber hoch schimfieret: gegrüßet seist du mir!”

Ach gib dass ich mich halte, zu dir und deiner Treu, un wenn ich nun erkalte, in dir mein Ende sei.

AMEN.