

Good Friday, Year C – April 15, 2022  
Epiphany, Winnipeg  
Rev. Paul Sartison

There's something so touching about this story. Such a gentle ending. There are these two men there. One of them is Nicodemus, who is a leader in his community and a faithful member of important religious circles. He once came to Jesus under cover of darkness, under cover of darkness because he was afraid to be seen with him. He asked Jesus question after question and we're never quite sure whether Nicodemus got it. And there's Joseph of Arimathea, and the only thing we know about him is that he followed Jesus, but he followed Jesus in secret, because he was afraid of the authorities.

But now Nicodemus and Joseph are finished with hiding and they just come right out in plain sight, in the light of day, to ask Pilate if they could take down Jesus' body and bury it. Pilate, who had just hours ago handed Jesus over to be crucified, now hands Jesus over to be buried. So Nicodemus and Joseph take down the body of Jesus from the cross. They carefully wrap his body in linen cloth, and they have spices and fragrance that they wrap in with the linen, preparing his body for burial just like his friend Mary prepared him by pouring perfume on his feet, just a few days before. Then Nicodemus and Joseph take the body of Jesus and put it in a tomb. Maybe we're supposed to make so much out of the violence or the suffering of the story, but right here the violence and the suffering give way to the tenderness of these two who carefully prepare their friend's body for burial and then place him and say goodbye.

It is a gentle ending. A tender treatment of their friend's body, a body that had been treated with such violence and anger earlier that same day. There's a

kind of gentleness and love that doesn't make the trauma go away, but it gets the last word; it is the last act. This kindness is the last piece of the story.

There's an important detail, something to keep in mind; something that's so obvious it almost sounds silly but it matters so much... It's that all of this story of the salvation of the whole world, is a story about bodies. The second last thing Jesus says before he dies is "I'm thirsty," and who among us hasn't known how it feels when you're thirsty and your body just cries out for some water. Standing close as Jesus dies is his mother, who carried him around in her body for nine months, and that connection between them will always be deep.

When Jesus is on trial a white-bodied man from Rome named Pilate sits with a brown-bodied man from Palestine named Jesus and they interrogate each other, while somewhere outside in the courtyard Peter and some police, and a slave, and an anonymous woman are standing around warming their chilled bodies by the fire. The last time Jesus sat down to eat with his disciples – they ate together, fed their bodies – at that last meal Jesus washed their feet...their bodies...and gave them one last word: Just love one another.

We don't sit and stand and sing and pray and speak and listen today to retell some kind of heavenly battle of otherworldly forces, or to try to make sense of ideas or concepts or theology or philosophy. Everything we hear about today happens to or by or with bodies, with real people in real life. And as we hear about Joseph and Nicodemus taking the body of their friend Jesus down from the cross, we remember that way back, right around Christmas, we also heard about the Word being made flesh, a child, a living body. Just like us. Just like anyone.

This Good Friday is another chapter in the story of God coming to be with us as a real human, a real person, sharing the life and the love and the hurt and the trust and suspicions of the real people all around. It's a chapter at the centre of the story that we all live in, where there is fear in our own hearts – just sit with that fear for a minute – and we know about fear in nations in the news and in nations that have been largely forgotten. We know about racism or sexism or homophobia or all those things, all those divisions, all that hate, all that injustice, that just makes no sense....those are pieces of the world, things that real people with real bodies experience. Friends share a meal with friends, friends turn against friends; there is deep deep love between people and then there are those who are left all alone. Do you know those things? Bodies thrive and grow and do amazing things, bodies wear out with time and finally just can't keep going. That's the world that Jesus shares with us too.

This Good Friday keeps our feet planted right here on the ground. This betrayal and arrest and crucifixion of Jesus tells the story of our God who does not save the world by taking us all away from it. It tells the story one more time of our God who saves the world by coming to be with us in it; it tells the story of our God who takes flesh, a body, and is committed to being with us even when that means suffering, and wearing out, and dying.

Then this chapter today wraps up with the tender and gentle care of two people who lay their friend's body to rest. And we're left with a glimmer of hope that tenderness and gentleness and love and life will have the last word. So we rest today, in stillness, and we wait.