

*Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all. Amen.*

What brings us back to this horrible story, year after year?

We replay it, rehearse it, once more with feeling – this ghastly tale of humans exercising what limited power they have in the most brutal and destructive way, to torture and execute a man whom the rest of the of the story has told us was exemplary in every way – was Love personified, Truth personified – The Way, the Truth, the Life, the Light of the World; who demonstrated tremendous power, who commanded deep devotion, who healed impossible conditions, who proclaimed forgiveness and freedom...

There are plenty of stories of human brutality, unfortunately – right up to this day, but rarely of a victim this transformational.

What brings us back to this story, year after year, like cosmic rubber-neckers returning the scene of the accident, the bloody mess?

Those of us who are exploring more deeply the roots of racism in our nation and in our nature, and we are learning a lot about trauma.

Researchers into trauma are discovering it can be passed along in families, in communities, from generation to generation.

Trauma inflicted upon a whole people – if left untreated – does not leave the body, but is carried along. The next generation learns the trauma responses.

So are as Christians suffering from some mass case of post-traumatic stress disorder?

Trauma survivors find they can't let go of the story; the memories just come up again and again.

Is that what we're doing, just playing and replaying our central trauma, this memory constantly triggered; everything pointing to this event; everything interpreted in light of it?

A non-believer looking at the patterns and rituals of the church might ask those questions.

OR are we telling and retelling and retelling the story about the time our car drove off the cliff, and, miraculously, we did not die?

We tell the story again and again because it is life for us; we proclaim it as life for us, we have experienced it as life for us.

Something saving happened in this ghastly tale – we need the whole story to know that, but we look at this story already knowing where the book ends. So we can look at it because we know we have been saved. We may not always feel we need saving – that’s a conversation for another day. If we’re here on Palm Sunday, I think we know our car is very capable of going off the cliff, maybe even has on more than one occasion, and the most amazing thing happened: we did not die. Indeed, now we know that we will not die forever.

This is a story we need to keep telling.
This is a story we need to keep living, to inhabit, to wear like skin.
We need not only to hear it and read it – we need to know it in our bones.
So I invite you this week to come closer.
Close enough to smell the blood; close enough to feel the love.

Don’t just jump in again at Easter, with the trumpets and the lilies.
Walk this story this week. Walk it, discover what new gifts God has for us – with each short service Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday nights on Zoom; What gifts has God has for us in our communal eating, washing, breaking, sharing on Maundy Thursday, even as we are separated, broken, in our own homes, the Spirit brings us into a wonderful intimacy/
Come receive what gifts God has for us as we walk the stations of the Cross at 10 o’clock on Good Friday morning, before we gather online at noon for the moving and solemn worship, reflecting during the hours Jesus hung on the cross on how that sacrifice means freedom for us;

And then, like those women who came in the middle of the night, in the dark just before dawn, to prepare Jesus’ body for burial and found no body at all – come in the dark on Saturday evening to hear in the dark the stories of how that rescue began – and then move into the light of our first Easter Alleluias.
And then on Easter Sunday we come to the end of the story having really experienced it, encountered it, really having received the gifts it has for us. God delights in showering us with gifts, and the only thing we need to do is show up for them.
So show up this week, my friends, mostly online, here and there in person, And receive the gift of this great love story.
Amen.