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Isaiah 52: 13 – 53: 12
Hebrews 10: 16 – 25Psalm 22
John 18: 1 – 19: 42

All is mockery. All is death. All is dark. All is over. An evening and a morning of charade, of derision, of questioning, of brutality, of humiliation, of sarcasm, of epic misunderstanding. And it has all come down to this: an incredibly vulnerable, weak and dying man. An unusual and charismatic man to be sure, nevertheless, merely a man. A man mourned by a small fringe of the gathered crowd - the ones with tears instead of jeers on their faces. What will they do now, without this man? Where will they go? How can they possibly get on with their lives? It is not just the death of their friend and teacher on the cross. Their hopes, their trust in God's salvation, their new way of being in the world are nailed up with him on the cross. Their hearts and their minds are shrouded in the darkness of inconsolable grief.

For the last 40 days, we have been pondering Lent as a time and place of refuge. As a place to meet God on a more profound level. As a nest in which we are incubated by the power of the Holy Spirit in order to grow and come to life in our relationship with God. As a time where it is safe to be vulnerable, safe to look inside the dark places of ourselves because we are intentionally in the presence of the One who knows and loves us more than we can ask or imagine. As a place of refuge where we can look in the mirror without fear, and learn to not be afraid of our own shadow, our own brokenness.

Lent as refuge. Good Friday as refuge. It sounds rather like an oxymoron. How can the ones who stand at the foot of the cross, and even those who have run away, possibly see even a glimmer of Light in the darkness that has befallen them? How can there be a shred of hope left for them? Only later, with time and distance, reflection and understanding, will those gathered at the cross learn that it is in fact a place of refuge. Only later will they come to realize the fullness of the presence of God at the cross.

As we ponder both the horror and the beauty of the cross this day, we realize that we are so much like these at the foot of the cross. The darkness of the world *outside* us and the darkness of the world *inside* us sometimes seem impenetrable. We fail to see the fullness of God's presence in our lives. We have tried to find refuge in Lent, but on this day, we are laid bare, exposed for all the world to see who and what we really are. On this day, as we come face to face with the consequences of our brokenness, it is hard to see the cross as a safe harbor, a safe harbor, a sanctuary, a refuge. And yet, on this day, we flee to the very one whom we have crucified.

On Good Friday, we come to realize that *we* are actually the incredibly vulnerable, weak and dying ones, and that the one hanging on the cross was and is and always will be the true source of Life and Light. On Good Friday, it is hard to see that there actually *is* a Light that lightens the darkness, a Light which nothing can quench. For now, we wait at the foot of the cross with all the others who weep and watch this night. With all those who know no hope or refuge in this world. With all those who do not yet know that source of Light and Life and Refuge. For now, we cling to the cross, seeking shelter and security, like a sailor clings to the mast of a ship in the middle of a hurricane. For now, we, too, wait and wonder, not yet realizing the fullness of God's presence and love and grace and forgiveness in this instrument of torture, this instrument of earth-shattering change.

We, who are so far removed in time and space from the real cross, know that, despite all evidence to the contrary, we live in the paradoxical moment of "yes, but not yet." We are blessed to know that the cross is not the end of the story, that something so far beyond our wildest dreams is yet to come, that all hope is not lost. That all trust in God's salvation is not misplaced. And that God is our refuge and strength, even on this day, perhaps most especially on this day. +