

Good Friday 2018
March 30, 2018
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

Some of our confirmands were apparently zoned out during last Saturday night's dramatic presentation of the Passion according to St. Mark. This is although, other than launching a full-out Oberammergau-style Passion play, we couldn't have made it much more gripping. The cast members memorized their lines and delivered them soulfully, sometimes in motion, which really livened things up. Cindy Vandermolen read the lines of Jesus at the Last Supper in Hebrew as well as in English, standing at the altar with matzoh and wine. Afterwards, when Miss Meg asked for the kids' reactions, she was met with silence. (Keep in mind that we are not accustomed to silence in the presence of that many 7th and 8th graders. ☺) Met with the adults' incredulous silence, one of the confirmands courageously voiced her honest opinion that she was confused. She said the story itself was kind of confusing. And it **can** be. All that back-and-forth during the trial. Two trials actually, one in front of the chief priests and Sanhedrin, the other in front of Pilate.

One of the other students apparently intuited what we **really** wanted to hear, and said the presentation was "inspiring." "Phew," I thought. My relief lasted a full two seconds until **another** kid, said, "No, it wasn't." My pastor's heart sank. "Where have I failed??" I stayed outwardly calm and asked the young man, "What **do** you find inspiring?" He responded, "I find two things inspiring: succeeding and learning from failure." Clearly, he's a thoughtful kid.

So we talked about how the Passion story ended: with Jesus' closest friends nowhere in sight and Jesus' lifeless body being tucked into the tomb by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. 'Doesn't leave the impression of a blazing success, and nobody appears to have learned from their abject failures along the Way. Odd: it's not often that we know of a happy ending and neglect to tell it. But that's what we do, on Palm Sunday and Good Friday. We don't tell the whole tale. We

withhold the best part for another day. We show restraint. We let the sad part of the story breathe. We enter into its tragic details –resisting the temptation to fast forward through the difficult parts. Because Judas’ failure in betraying, Peter’s failure in denying, the religious leaders’ failure in convicting, Pilate’s failure in caving to the will of the mob, the soldiers’ failure in crucifying the Lord of Life, those failures are ours, too, and we need to learn from their replay in our lives.

We also linger on the beginning and middle of the Greatest Story Ever Told because they hold so many “Gifts Given” to recognize and thank God for. We need to be reminded of God’s largesse, God’s out-sized kindness, God’s extraordinary mercy, throughout. Like Friar Lawrence says to Romeo in *Romeo & Juliet*, “A pack of blessings lies upon thy back!” and we don’t realize it.

It just so happens that this year Good Friday falls on the first night of Passover. Our Jewish brothers and sisters will pray and eat and sing around the family dinner table, remembering how the Almighty reached out with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm to free them from slavery in Egypt. One of the songs is “Dayenu,” meaning “It would have been enough.” There are **many** stanzas, but here are just a few:

Had God only taken us
Out of Egypt –
It would have been enough.

Had God only split the sea for us –
And led us through dry-shod --
It would have been enough.

Had God only fed us with manna –
And brought us safely through the desert --
It would have been enough.

Had God only led us to Mt. Sinai
And given us the Torah –
It would have been enough.

Had God only brought us safely
To the Promised Land –
It would have been enough.

The Christian version of that?

Had God only sent the Son
To pitch His tent among us,
It would have been enough.

Had our Savior only shown us
How to love
It would have been enough.

Had our Jesus only healed the sick
And cast out demons
It would have been enough.

Had our Lord only fed the multitude
With 5 loaves and 2 fish
It would have been enough.

Had He only washed His disciples' feet
It would have been enough.

Had He only born the scorn
Of Sanhedrin and soldiers
It would have been enough.

Had He only asked God's forgiveness
Of His tormentors, of us,
It would have been enough.

Had He only promised Paradise
To the repentant thief
It would have been enough.

Had He only commended His Spirit
Into His Father's hands,
It would have been enough.

Had our Father in heaven only given us life,
It would have been enough.
But through His Son
He has given us eternal life besides.

I want the confirmands, I want **all** our children, I want all of **us**, to kneel, at least in our hearts, in awe before the cross and to have even the tiniest inkling of the magnificence of the Gift Given by our Father in heaven, of our Lord Jesus Christ. I want to show the kids, to share with the kids “**my** Jesus” in such a way that they believe in their hearts, “This is **my** Jesus, too.” I want them to know He isn’t a doctrine to be learned; he is a Person to be loved. This isn’t ancient history. This is **our** story. We’re not casual observers or lackadaisical students of the sacred. We are players, center stage, in salvation history and we are on the personal receiving end of God’s love and forgiveness. This isn’t something to yawn about. It’s something to applaud or cry over or be rendered speechless by, not because it’s so confusing, but because it’s so incredible and reaches so deeply into each of our hearts.

There’s magnificent classical and contemporary artwork of our Lord on the cross. But my favorite image is from a prayer card I received in kindergarten or first grade, one I’ve misplaced and am always looking for. It’s of a little girl with a Buster Brown haircut, wearing Mary Janes and a pretty frock, reaching up on tiptoe toward the crucified Jesus who gently looks upon her in love. My Jesus looks upon me with love. My Jesus looks upon you in love. May we look upon our Jesus in the same way. Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham