

Good Friday Homily  
St. Stephen's Church

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March 21, 2008

We have been about it nearly 40 days and 40 nights now. We have re-examined, re-evaluated, re-assessed. It is time. It is time now that we know, or acknowledge at least, what are some of the things that are killing us; more politely put: what it is that is separating us from living fully, richly; more theologically put: what is separating us on our account from the love of God.

Now the question becomes: are we willing to take up our cross, our instrument of death, pick it up daily, and follow Jesus upon it. Christians, above all people perhaps, are people keenly aware of being invited into death. Our Teacher has called us to follow him, and to do so means to lose your life in order to save it; to do so means to give all away for his sake. And Good Friday, above all liturgical services, invites us into death, his and ours, as well.

Within each of us, every day, we are choosing or allowing ourselves to be animated by a particularly "flavored" life-force, or spirit.

The life-force that is within "our-created" life is as diverse and varied as are we who are gathered here:

Fear, anger, bitterness – one of those is so much in a lot of us.

Also, there is the thrust for creating security, being responsible, questing for power.

Some here are so much about living up to expectations, or proving adequacy and competency, or demonstrating mastery and "having it all together."

Then as well among us are individuals who each day they awake and have the undergirding and overwhelming sense of feeling victimized or broken or disappointed.

These 40 days and 40 nights can have been about identifying what life-force, what spirit, we each "feels in our souls to be living the life we do. And hence identifying all those elements, those ways of thinking, acting, and habits of our hearts that fail us.

Fail us means they keep us from the Life-force of God, our Maker and our Destiny, in our living. These lesser life-forces we are choosing or allowing to dominate in us are killing some of us, with the stress and anxiety that follows in their wake. The Celtic service often has a prayer in it that says it this way: "We pray for all those who are their own worse enemies..."

I am becoming more and more convinced that the life God has in store for me, and the one God has in store for you, is far better – eternally better – than the life that I try to carve out for myself.

So if these nearly 40 days and 40 nights have identified those realities that are in us, then we know the instrument of our deaths, that are occurring even now. Take those up this day, carry that cross, plant it right there in front of or beside or behind – but near – Jesus on that cross. And breathe in his death.

A well-known passage in the Old Testament account of the prophet Elijah tells of his stay in the home of the widow of Zarephath. She recognized him as a man of God, and offered him, in his travels, hospitality in her home. While Elijah was there, her son died. The widow laments to Elijah, and he responds: "Give me your son." He carries the boy into his "upper chamber" and laid him on his bed. He cried to God. He stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried to the Lord: "O Lord my God, let this child's soul come into him again." (see 1<sup>st</sup> Kings 17: 8ff) The child revived. Stretched out upon him, the Spirit of God breathed in his death, life.

The image that has kept coming into my imagination is that of Christ on the cross, and myself lying on top of him, or perhaps on my cross facing directly towards His face.

Again, that is a graphic image, stark and overwhelming. If we would but do that, what does that mean? By it I mean its like two hunters, on foot, off in the bush. They stalked their prey for hours, mounted it on a pole they grasped on their shoulders and carried between them back toward home, for hours more. The day is done and twilight is upon them as they finally reach the front porch of their lodge. They lay down their load. They collapse in the chairs. They rest, sprawled, motionless, soundless, utterly.

Do that near his cross, with all the weight of those lesser-than-Love life-spirits that animate us, all those life-draining strategies and ways of living your days and nights, all that you have been carrying all these days and nights, all these years, all this life even. Give it up to Him. That we might have his mind in us, the scripture says.

And let death come to it. Let death come to all that is killing us. Let death come to all those ways we have devised to live our lives. Be there, utterly exhausted in them.

That is not the last word, of course. But we do need to stay here a while. But know these two things too.

The Christian faith says this: creation is always happening. Behold, God is doing a new thing, now. It is new at this very moment. You are – can be – a new creation should we be bold enough to dare to give our life to the Cross as the way of life.

Because there we meet something beyond death. It is new life birthed in the life force gifted us by God, the Life Spirit that is holy, that is of Divine Love.

And finally, know this, that, and I apologize for bringing me into it, I can best tell you from recent personal experience.

My experiences this Lent, quite frankly, have been extraordinary. I have been so blessed, and it has brought this reality to me in ways that even a hard-headed, thick-skinned, hard-hearted person like me has not been able to ignore.

One late afternoon, after reading card after card, the dam finally broke. I began to weep uncontrollably in the wave after wave after wave of Love that was washing over me, and it has taken that for me to finally be unable to deflect, to de-value, to hasten by, to forget, to let anything come in the way of my knowing (Anselm's understanding) that God so loves me, so loves me, so loves me – and that He gave His Son for me, that I might “get it.”

The life force of Love is everything. The important thing about life is not how much we accomplish, but how much we are in Love, to us and through us.

May we die with Christ, that our Life may be filled with His. To think as He thinks; to love as He loves; to permit Him full use of ourselves; that all the world we come into contact with becomes new by the power of the resurrection.