

Tuesday in Holy Week - Year B
April 7, 2009
The Reverend Brett P. Backus

“The Presence of Light Even Amidst the Darkness of Holy Week”

John 12:20-36

“While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.”

Today's Gospel is about Faith. It is about believing in the presence of God even when we feel utterly alone. It is about believing in the light even in the midst of what seems like pure darkness.

So here we are, Tuesday night of Holy Week, and all things spiritual and liturgical for us at this moment point to the end. Tomorrow night we will participate in our Tenebrae service, meaning darkness or shadows, in which we recreate and participate in the emotional aspects of our Lord's passion. Thursday evening is our Maundy Thursday service where we commemorate Jesus' Last Supper with His disciples, His washing of the disciples' feet, the institution of the Holy Eucharist, His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, and finally His betrayal by one of His own flock. On Good Friday we commemorate the crucifixion and death of our Savior, and on Holy Saturday we wait with our Christ in the tomb. Yes, at this moment, all things point to the end.

This evening's Gospel reading is actually much the same. Here with the arrival of the Greeks or the Gentiles who have sought Him out, we see Jesus accepting His destiny and making one final appeal to the crowds for faith. This appeal, of course falls on deaf ears, or at least ears that were confused and otherwise unable to truly hear. Christ's appeal to the crowds was this:

“The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.”

All things spiritual and liturgical this evening point us to the end.

So, in seeing this evening in such a way, as I was preparing for this evening's sermon, I found myself asking a question. What does this evening's Gospel say to us Christians? If Jesus' message in this evening's Gospel was an appeal to faith for unbelievers, then what

are we, the community of faith, supposed to take from tonight's Gospel? I have a story that I would like to share with you this evening. It is a story that some of you have heard me tell in another sermon, but it is a story that deeply affected me and that I believe can really give us some insight into what we as Christians might take from Jesus' words in this evening's Gospel. It is a story about an experience that a dear friend of mine had while on our first mission trip to La Paz, Bolivia.

One evening as our group was walking back to our hotel after finishing a night of street mission, we passed by an old Catholic cathedral. On the steps of that cathedral, were a handful of homeless children, alone and hungry on a cold night. Now, one of my friend's, Bill, saw this and being the incredibly caring soul that he is, could not just pass by without doing anything. So, Bill motioned for the children to stay where they were, and he quickly returned to our hotel, secretly snuck out again alone (something that was strongly forbidden) and brought back with him some children's books in Spanish which our group was planning to give to a local school. When he returned, he bought the children some food from a street vendor, and in his very poor and almost non-existent Spanish, he began to read to the children on the steps of the church. Needless to say, the children crowded around Bill, enjoying their food and the story, and laughing at the "Gringo" trying to read Spanish.

After Bill had finished the stories, there was nothing more that he felt he could do considering his lack of Spanish and unfamiliarity with the city. So, he got up and he slowly began to depart. Then suddenly, one of the smaller boys in the group grabbed Bill's hand. Bill was surprised, and he looked at the child. But the child said nothing. The child then began to gently pull Bill's hand as if he wanted to take him somewhere. Bill, intrigued, began to follow the child.

The young boy took Bill around the church to a small, dark alley where there was a small door on the church. Bill did not know if this door was left open for the children or if this was only something secret that the little boy knew about, but they slowly entered. Upon entering, and after his eyes slowly adjusted to the darkness, Bill realized that the boy had led him into the sanctuary of the church. The place was dimly lit with some candles and Bill could hardly see, but he followed the boy to the altar. The boy knelt and began to pray silently, so, Bill knelt and began to pray silently as well. Then, after they spent several long minutes in prayer, the young boy rather suddenly stood up. He stood up and he pulled Bill to his feet, and he looked at Bill and spread out his arms wide and said, "No tengas miedo, Dios esta aqui." After that the boy led Bill outside and the two parted ways. The small boy disappeared into the night. Now, Bill did not know Spanish, and he later confessed to me what he had done and what had taken place that night, and he asked me to translate what that little boy had said. He had memorized the boy's words and repeated them over and over so as not to forget. When I told Bill what the boy had said, Bill broke down and began to cry. The boy said, "No tengas miedo, Dios esta aqui." It means, "Do not be afraid, God is here"

God is here. This is the message that I would like for us to take from this evening. God is here. You are never alone. You see, even though we find our selves in this Holy Week moment when all things spiritual and liturgical point to the end. We, as a people of faith already know the Good News, and it cannot be fully suppressed. Though it is good and very important that we consciously walk through and devoutly attempt to experience this time of darkness as was experienced by our Lord and Savior, we cannot deny that we are a resurrected people, we are an Easter people, always. Yet, though the joy of resurrection is a part of our daily reality, it is still important for us to hear this message this evening. Its important for us to hear the words of the small Bolivian boy in the story I shared, and to attempt to live out his message and Jesus' message for us in this evening's Gospel. God is here. Believe in the light. Because the reality is that we as people or Christians do not only experience what seems like an absence of God's presence during Holy Week. This is not the only dark time in our lives. Whether it be sickness, suffering, death, etc., our lives are filled over and over again with what seem like Holy Week experiences when we fear the loss of God's presence on earth. So I would like to encourage us all this evening to use our experience of Holy Week as a kind of spiritual learning tool. Walk through these next days reflectively, experience the coming darkness, the coming emptiness, and forever hold onto the feeling and experience that comes with the realization this Sunday morning that indeed Jesus did not abandon us after all. Hold on to that experience as a beacon of hope to be used in your future dark times and Holy Week moments. Hold on to the feeling you have when you finally realize that the light never left you, that we are not alone. Do not be afraid, God is here.

“While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.”

Amen.