Good Friday—Year A
Isaiah 52:13-53:12
Psalm 22
Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9
John 18:1-19:42

And so, we come to Good Friday. We walk this path to the cross yet again, this time from **John's** perspective. And these scriptures we hear, they do their best to orient us, even while it all descends into chaos.

Isaiah helps us understand that messiahs don't always override the forces that would destroy; indeed, **messiahs can suffer**, and maybe that's the most liberating possibility for all those who are beaten down in this world by pain and injustice.

Psalm 22 will remind us that **feeling forsaken, even by God**, can be a profound statement of faith and trust.

Hebrews tells us that **we have a high priest who can sympathize with our weakness, who has been tested in every respect, just like us, yet without sin** (we'll come back to that) **and this opens, for us, a path to receive mercy and find grace to help when we're in need.**

And **John's** account, it has a whole different flavor that **Mark** or **Matthew** or **Luke**. Over and over, **Jesus** is answering, in one form or another, **"I am he. I am he. I AM." Jesus knows, in the depth of his being that he is BEING itself**. Just as **God proclaimed from that burning bush**, **"I AM WHO I AM. I AM BEING. I AM PRESENCE. I AM THE GROUND OF ALL THAT IS," Jesus knows he IS DIVINE PRESENCE and nothing, nothing can throw him out of that holy of holies.**

And this is juxtaposed with so many *negations*. *"**Peter**, aren't you one of his disciples?" "I am NOT." "I am NOT." "I am NOT." **Peter** denies, cuts himself off from, that connection to Divine Presence.* This is the **very definition of sin**—*to be separate from, to feel oneself cutoff from the whole.* And this is why **Hebrews** can proclaim that **Jesus is without sin**—**he is never *not* in PRESENCE**.

Even the **religious leaders**, they live in a place of *negation*. They **can't even enter Pilate's headquarters for fear that they would be ritually defiled and be unable to eat the Passover**. They **can't release this innocent man** for fear of what it would actually mean if they accept that the Son of God is among them. They are constrained, imprisoned by all those things that they cannot do, and in the end, they **stake their claim with the empire and *not* with the PRESENCE whose kingdom is not from this world**.

And then, there is the **ultimate negation of violence** and **degradation** and **death—the ultimate *"I am NOT."***.

But for all the things that ***others cannot do***, ***for all that they negate***, **Jesus just keeps walking forward**, in freedom, in absolute freedom, carrying that **PRESENCE** through all the inconceivable places—loosening the tethers of his earthly relationships; ensuring those closest to him are entrusted to the care of one another; walking into the heart of pain and suffering; thirsting; and finishing what he must to *pull back the curtain, even tear it in two*, **to reveal the unfathomable depths of God's LOVE, the inconceivable reality of God's PRESENCE**.

When all in this world **would crucify Jesus**, **the great I AM remained**, with **arms outstretched, holding it all in LOVE and PRESENCE** *so that we would know* that **nothing can separate us from the love of God**.

Oh, at times, we may feel ourselves cutoff, utterly alone; at times, in our pain, we may even try to sever our connection, but **Jesus came into the world to testify to the truth that God's PRESENCE REMAINS; in the face of our negations**, in the **depth of our pain**, in the **midst of suffering** and **inconceivable injustice** and all that is **unbearable and unthinkable**, ***even when death robs our breath***, **God's PRESENCE REMAINS**. For every *"I am NOT"* that humanity has ever uttered, today, from this cross, **God has answered resoundingly, "I AM…AND I WILL ALWAYS BE."**

This is the **gospel in its rawest and most redemptive form**; *this* is **the love that saves us**; *this* is **the love that sets us free**, that will **sit with us and hold us in all our tombs of negation**, knowing that *not even the stone* can seal that **PRESENCE** away. ***Love will come again; the great I AM will not be denied***. Amen.

The Rev. Cynthia K. R. Banks
St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Boone, NC
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