

Love Poured Out

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Hebrews 10:16-25

John 18:1-19:42

Psalm 22

Have any of you ever studied the Old Testament temple? Did you know the details within the construction of the Hebrew temple offer a roadmap for salvation. Every single component, from its shape, construction materials, the items inside, and even the colors were all specifically dictated to represent some component of God's saving work that started in the Garden and would continue through Christ. My favorite part of the temple construction is the veil. Not only was it intricately woven with blue, purple, and scarlet in patterns representing the protection of the angels, but it was also said to be at least a handbreadth, or four inches thick. It was 60 feet high, 30 feet wide, and was responsible for protecting the people from the presence of God which existed beyond it in the Holy of Holies. At the moment of Jesus' death, each of the synoptic gospels tell us that the veil was torn in half from top to bottom. Jesus' sacrifice removed the barrier of sin which separated us from God, atonement was made, and the light of God's love came pouring out freely from behind that curtain.

Today the author of Hebrews quotes the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah was looking ahead in hope to a time when taking sacrifices to the temple would no longer be required. For Jeremiah, regular sacrifices were the only way to uphold the covenant and remain in relationship with God. But he foretold of a day, when that sacrifice would be completed and no future sacrifices would be required. The letter to the Hebrews tells us that, because of Jesus' sacrifice, we can now confidently enter beyond that impenetrable veil. The image we are given is of Jesus' own body being the veil torn in half through which we experience the love of God. We call this atonement or being made "at one" with God because we now live according to the new and living way Jesus opened for us.

For two thousand years people have been asking why Jesus had to die. Jesus died because there was no other way to show us the radical love of God. Jesus' death was the only way for us to understand how to follow God into this new and living way. Jesus had to be hated, feared, betrayed, and murdered for the veil to be torn so we could observe the depth of God's love; so our eyes could be opened to see this new and living way. Two thousand years later we continue to scratch our heads because, while we feel the love that has been poured out from beyond that veil, the Living Way Jesus offers is the way of the cross. And while we all want to experience the living way, our flesh recoils against walking the Via Dolorosa.

In John's gospel we encounter Jesus in the garden. The cosmic power of the creator of life is so supercharged within Jesus at that moment that the guards literally fall to the ground at the sound of his name. I am, Yahweh, a name so sacred the ancient Hebrews would not even speak it. Jesus claims it for himself, and they fall at his feet. The irony is laughable. The guards cannot stand before the creative force of life and yet they have come to take him to his death. When his own disciples try to shield him, Jesus says, "am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?" The cup God asked him to drink, the cup Jesus asked to have removed when praying just hours before, is the cup of suffering. Even Jesus did not desire to suffer. But here is the thing about the power of God. Here is the reason Jesus did what he did on our behalf. In God's kingdom, power always forfeits itself on behalf of the weak. Jesus was not overpowered by the might of the Roman army; they couldn't even stay on their feet in his presence. Jesus laid down his power to show us the cosmic, creative, infinite, lifegiving, resurrection power of love.

Jesus willingly took and drank the cup of suffering and death. Jesus understood what we are still trying to grasp all these centuries later, in God's kingdom, death never has the last word. In fact, in Christ, love will always overpower death.

Both the Psalmist and Ezekiel use the imagery of Jesus being poured out. In Hebrew imagery, sacrifices were brought to the temple, and the burnt offerings were consumed in the fire. But drink offerings were poured out before the altar. Jesus was not consumed by his sacrifice. Rather, he poured himself out. He willingly and totally surrendered himself as a drink offering on our behalf. God handed him the cup of suffering. He consumed it, taking the suffering into himself, and pouring his full self out on our behalf.

Jesus' new and living way is confusing for us because we want the living part without the suffering part. We want to experience resurrection without ever having to die. But that isn't how the kingdom of God works. It is because the curtain was torn that we are now able to experience unity with God. Our salvation is only possible through the ripped flesh of Christ. Our participation in Jesus' New and Living Way is only possible through our willingness to likewise lay our lives down. Jesus' way trusts resurrection. Jesus' way forfeits the power to protect ourselves from pain. Following Jesus' new and living way will require us to drink whatever cup of suffering God may be offering us on behalf of others. Those who follow this way are more concerned with removing the barriers, the veils, and whatever else others experience keeping them from God than they are with maintaining their own wellbeing.

Living this new and living way requires a dedication to making it available to others, regardless of the personal cost. The author of Hebrews knows how challenging it is to live this way. He tells us that we find the strength to do this through our faithful commitment to meet together and encourage one another. The final verse of our Psalm indicates that the integrity we dedicate to living this way will carry salvation's message ahead to those yet unborn!

Good Friday is the one day each year we dedicate to the silence of the grave. Here we hold the tension of sacrifice and the of suffering of death. We acknowledge that, on this day, because of their fear and confusion over Jesus' perceived failure, even the apostles left

Jesus. Integrity requires us, in the silence of this day, to interrogate our own inner lives. We must ask ourselves what suffering, what indignity, what injustice, what indignation, or grief we have suffered that has caused us to leave Jesus. What have we experienced that made us believe those deaths were stronger than our hope in the promise of resurrection. Where have we clung to our own power, allegiances, or comforts when we needed to lay them down on behalf of someone else.

Jesus willingly endured the worst of human sin. His love absorbed it without retaliation. He drew near to the pain of others when he could have avoided it. And it was through the power of that supernatural love that the veil was torn in half so we could experience unity with God.

Jesus' new and living way offers us the opportunity to join Christ in providing access to God for others through Christ. The way of life is the way of the cross. Today, as we wait outside the tomb...

May our confidence in resurrection carry us into Jesus' New and Living Way.