

Sermon: THE PASSION OF GOD
Rev. Steve Garnaas-Holmes
Saint Matthew's UMC
Palm / Passion Sunday, April 9, 2017

This story starts out beautifully enough with a meal, a table and friends... but we know it's going to get darker. Gathered around Jesus is evil itself. We will see evil in its systemic form. There's no one individual, not even Judas, who is responsible for what we are about to see. Every social and religious and political power structure has an agenda, and they will hurt people in order to fulfill their agenda. That's how evil works. Though it might seem foreign to us to imagine Jesus being crucified, it's happening today. We have prisons. We have people being arrested and beaten, banned, tortured, profiled, executed. The cross is *our* world, it's *our* evil.

In this story we also see evil on a very personal level. Jesus' own friends, his best friends, will gather right here at the table with him; but before long they will be afraid—with good reason—and their fear will make them intensely selfish. They will deny and betray him. They will all fail him, they will all flee. They will protect themselves, and they will hurt people in order to protect themselves. That's how evil works.

There's a lot of darkness in this story, but through all the darkness watch the light move from beginning to end. Jesus will only love. Even when he sees who his disciples are and who they will fail to be, he just loves them. He knows what's coming. He can see it. He invites them to dinner with him because he loves them. He gives himself to them. "This is my body, this is my blood." He gives his life wholly to them because he loves them.

In Jesus' culture every dinner was seated according to social status, which the host determined. And who does Jesus seat right next to him, in the seat of honor, the one who dips bread right with him? Judas. Because Jesus loves him. He knows what Judas is about to do and loves him anyway.

That is the root and the source of all our hope. Jesus will be that loving all the way to the end. He will never compromise, never back down, never quit. He will just be loving. In all that darkness there is that light that's poured out in this cup that we feast on, in this bread, so Jesus' love might be in us. This faith: not that things will always be all right, but that no matter how awful it gets God is there with us. That no matter how awful *we* get God is there for us.

So we pray that we will receive that love, and as nothing else will, that love will bless us and fill us and save us and change us.