

Professor Stephanie Paulsell

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me from the words of my groaning?

My God, I cry by day but you do not answer and by night, but find no rest.

Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. In you, our ancestors trusted, they trusted and you delivered them.

Do not be far from us for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

But you lord do not be far away, our help come quickly to our aid. Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Stephanie Paulsell, the Interim Minister of the Memorial Church. And it is my great honor to welcome you to our Good Friday service. We gather on this holy day to remember the death of Jesus and to meditate on his last words. Many of these words forged as they are in suffering are hard to hear, forsaken, thirst, finished. They are deeply human words that echo in the world around us and within us. On Good Friday, we listen closely and try to hear them, really hear them before they disappear into silence. We are very grateful to those members of our community who will offer their reflections on these words.

The meditation on the first word is offered by, Nathan Samayo, a first year MDiv. student in the Harvard Divinity School. Professor Emmanuel K. Akyeampong, Minister of Formation and Worship in the Memorial Church. Professor in the Departments of History and African and African-American Studies and Director of Harvard Center for African Studies offers the second meditation. Jess Young Chang, a second year, MDiv. student in the divinity school offers the third. And Elizabeth Propst a junior in Harvard College and member of our student advisory board offers the fourth. The Reverend Wes. Conn, our ministry fellow, offers the fifth meditation. Laura Glass, our student programming fellow the sixth. And Aiden Stoddard, a senior in Harvard College and member of our student advisory board will give the seventh and final meditation.

The Reverend Alana Sullivan, our Associate Minister offers prayers at the end of the service and Edward Jones, Gund University, Organist and Choir Master accompanies the hymns, which you can find in the online bulletin on our website, www.memorialchurch.harvard.edu. We invite you, if you wish to sing along.

The gospels, tell us that a group of women who loved Jesus remained at the foot of the cross until he breathed his last. They stayed with him and they did not turn away, gathered with them on this holy day, may we learn from them how to stay turned toward love in the midst of pain and sorrow, even in the midst of death. Would you pray with me? God, you meet us in life and in death, in words and in silence, gather us up in this moment into a listening, longing community, connected to one another, no matter where we are in the world. Open our hearts to hear the words Jesus exhaled on his last breaths, nourish us with the meditation's prepared by our teachers, our ministers, our students and our friends.

Be with us as we remain with the women at the foot of the cross, until all words have ceased and we seek you in the silence you feel with your presence. Amen. Please join us in singing hymn number 160. When I survey the wondrous cross, found in your online or ship bulletin.

(Hymn, singing)

(silence)

Nathan Samayo MDiv I

A reading from the Gospel according to Luke chapter 23, beginning at the 32nd verse. Two others also who were criminals were led away to be put to death with him. When they came to the place that is called the skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing and the people stood by watching. But the leaders scoffed at him saying, "He saved others, let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one." The soldiers also mocked him coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself." There was also an inscription over him, this is the King of the Jews. Here ends the lesson.

Now, I can't help but think about all the death that we continue to metabolize as a nation and church community. Recently with our beloveds in Atlanta, at the hands of white supremacy, racial gendered and sexual violence that our country continues to dismiss. With our beloveds in Boulder, Colorado at the hands of more gun violence or how we continue to mourn and grieve yet exists in a world that as, Miroslav Volf would say, is hypocritical for praying for a problem that our nation is unwilling to resolve. Problems that dismiss and perpetuate, systemic evils that continue to rob the lives of the people that God has a preferential option for, the poor, the most marginalized. Communities of color who do not experience the full and abundant life made possible through Jesus's resurrection or how we long for that same redemption.

When Jesus turns to God and says, "father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." For whom is this they, that Jesus is referring to? For surely, we assume it's the people who were crucifying him, whether that be the Roman soldiers who Jesus was handed off to by, Pontius Pilate. The religious counsel who protested for the murder of Jesus or surely enough, the people in the crowd who continued to persuade, Pontius Pilate to convict Jesus and release, Barnabas. And at its end, Jesus receives the inhumane sentence of the death penalty. Now, whoever Jesus was referring to, why would he tell God to forgive them? And beyond that, why would they have to be forgiven if they do not know what they were doing? It makes me question, does that mean that people are inherently guilty for not knowing that they are causing or are complacent to harm and injustice, therefore are needed to be forgiven for their actions?

Now I want us to take a step back real quick, for the word forgiveness I feel has a deep enrich conviction for all of us. Jesus wants God to forgive the people who were crucifying him because they didn't know what they were doing. If anything, this act of asking for forgiveness I believe, is really an act of Jesus

calling forward the people who are crucifying him to wake up from their unknowing. To turn away from their individual culpability within the larger crowd of those, trying to unjustly crucify Jesus Christ. Therefore, Jesus asked God, "Father, forgive them for, they do not know what they are doing and make them repent to turn away from their evil acts of injustice and persecution. For the sake of creating a world where we may all live in peace and harmony with one another." What made Jesus be asking for God to forgive us for, for what is Jesus asking us to be responsible for as a church community?

The point of this, is whatever we are doing, whatever harms we are inflicting, that Jesus calls for us to be aware of those. And to combat those personal and systemic evils in the pursuit of a reconcile world. Jesus calls us to be accountable to one another, calling for a radical transformation and a radical sense of responsibility to each other. That same radicalness that Jesus had when asking God to forgive the people who crucified him, to take a stand against the harms that caused death in our world. The same harms that took the innocent lives of our beloveds in Atlanta and those in Boulder. God have mercy on us all. Church, let us pray. Creator, unconditional lover, pain bear, we anoint all those who act justly, who love mercy, who walk humbly.

We anoint all those who choose to be a keeper for one another. We pray for the souls that have been victimized by every infliction of violence. We pray that as Jesus asked you for forgiveness upon us, that we take the opportunity to breathe and speak life to one another and act for a call towards justice. Amen. Please join us in singing the hymn, My Song Is a Love Unknown, found in your worship bulletin online.

(Hymn, singing)

(silence)

Professor Emmanuel K. Akyeampong

A reading from the Gospel according to Luke chapter 23, beginning at the 39th verse. One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us." But the other rebuke to saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation and we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied, "Truly, I tell you today you will be with me in paradise." Here ends the lesson. As humans, we like to earn our keep, we have scenes that demonstrate this, I have earned my due, there is nothing like a free lunch. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tests the parable of the workers in the vineyard. The landlord now who goes out to hire men to work in his vineyard.

He finds the first batch early in the morning, say just before 6:00 AM. He agrees to pay them a denarius for the day's work, which is the daily wage. He goes again to the public square, where men wait to be hired for work at 9:00 AM. Then at noon, 3:00 PM and at 5:00 PM and hires the men there who still have not found work. At the close of the day before sunset, he calls the workers to give them their wages. He pays those who were hired first, giving them the agreed some of one denarius. But when he gave those who were hired at 5:00 PM and had worked just one hour a denarius, those who had worked all day were upset at why they considered unfairness. Similarly, it is easy to see Jesus' statement to the criminal

crucified with him. But today you will be with me in paradise, as unmerited for someone who had not lived a Godly or righteous life. The criminal had been asked to cross the finish line without running the race.

But for me, the critical question is what made the criminal conclude viewing a naked, bruised and dying Jesus, the epitome of powerlessness that Jesus was a King with a kingdom. Jesus hung defenseless on the cross taunted by the rulers and those who stood watching him. He saved others but he cannot save himself. But one of the criminals crucified with Jesus begs to differ, he seeks redemption from Christ and receives it. What went through the mind of the repentive criminal, that led to his confession and salvation? We will never know but in his dying moment, this criminal grasped the essence of mercy, not receiving whilst just deserves and grace, which is unmerited favor.

He grasped intuitively that time is reckoned differently in the economy of God's kingdom. He need not have lived his life as a disciple following Jesus, you only needed to believe in his heart and confess with his mouth, the lordship of Jesus and the lifetime of sin was rolled away. Jesus' death gave us access to our creator, God. A reality dramatized on that Good Friday by the tearing of the veil, that secluded the Holy of Holies in the temple of Jerusalem. The repentant criminal, somehow discerned that what appeared to be Jesus's weakest moment was his greatest triumph. May the Lord give us those same eyes-

Triumph, may the Lord give us those same eyes of faith that allowed the criminal to see a victorious King, not a helpless and abandoned religious leader. Amen. Let us pray, Lord God, you are God whose mercies are renewed each morning. You tell us in the book of Isaiah that when you forgive our sins you don't remember them anymore. As a God who does not keep count of our past transgressions, teach us to see ourselves with your eyes so that like the criminal who asked you to remember him in your kingdom, we will embrace the wonderful truth that we do not need to earn your grace. Indeed, we cannot earn what has been freely given. Christ was a victim of unjustified institutional violence. This day, we lift up victims of similar violence in the United States and abroad, praying especially for the many who have lost their lives and have been detained in the coup in Myanmar.

As vaccines for the coronavirus become available, we pray for the many countries around the world that do not have the resources to buy these vaccines, and are dependent on international arrangements to provide vaccines for free, that the spirit of compassion would guide these arrangements and that you, oh, Lord will heal the earth and your peoples. This Good Friday, may we draw close to the cross, that symbol of violence from which grace flowed and avail ourselves of the grace that was so freely given at Calvary. In your name, Lord Jesus, we have prayed. Amen. Please join us in singing the hymn, Cross of Jesus, Cross of sorrow.

(Hymn, singing)

(silence)

Jess Young Chang MDiv II

A reading from the Gospel, according to John 19:23. When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took His clothes and divided them into four parts. One for each soldier. They also took His tunic. Now, the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it. This was to fulfill what the scripture says. They divided my clothes among themselves and for my clothing, they cast lots. And that is what the soldiers did. Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus, where His mother and His mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing beside her, He said to His mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then He said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour, the disciple took her into his own home. Here ends the lesson.

What it must have been to be Jesus in this moment. I know it's impossible for us to imagine what it is to be God and human at the same time. But let's dwell for a moment with Jesus, right at that threshold of life and death, of human and divine, a full being an absolute nothingness. Imagine you're a person that's not too hard, you are a person, but today your personhood feels acute, feels dilated, even battered because it is in every way under attack. You have been beaten, so your head is throbbing. The iron sharp taste of blood is sticky in your mouth and it runs down your face, stinging your eyes and making it hard to see, a tooth, maybe loose or missing. You have hauled a large, heavy wooden burden from City Hall to the outskirts of town. So your muscles are screaming and trembling with effort.

Your back aches, your hands are cut up with splinters and your feet are raw, those pains are small compared to the holes in your wrists and feet, breaking the small bones in your hands that have fed, have blessed, have healed. On top of this, you're feeling humiliated. You're naked, cold mocked, and belittled by members of your own community who never really believed in you. Your closest friends, fearing for their own safety or protection have left you. You feel small, weak, afraid, unequal to the task before you, but none of this matters because you can't breathe. Every inhale is like trying to draw air into your lungs through water. You are literally drowning in open air. You pray that each exhale will be your last and yet your body is still screaming for breath. A breath that is painful even as it is necessary. Inhale, exhale.

I wonder about the divine side of Jesus amid the human suffering of His crucifixion. Did He know the end of His story in this moment? According to other Gospels, only hours before Jesus had prayed, father pass this cup before me Abba, please don't ask me to do this. He met His accusers with a sense of equanimity, but that equanimity seems to have fled from Him now on the cross. Is Jesus lonely for His father in this moment or angry with Him? Or perhaps Jesus is angry with Himself. Perhaps He feels He has failed at the responsibility, the ministry given to Him by God. Inhale, exhale. Jesus can't breathe. He is fully surrendered at the mercy of the state. His hands are in the air and He can't breathe. In this moment uncertain if He's fulfilled the will of the father, Jesus sees His aunt, Mary Magdalen and His mother.

It is a terrible thing to outlive your own child. And every parent who knows this will tell you so. What passes between them in that look? Does Jesus feel like a failure in the eyes of His mother? Does He look like a failure when Mary looks at Him? And then Jesus does an interesting thing. He says to His mom, "Woman, behold, your son." He says to His remaining disciple, "Behold, your mother." Jesus creates a new relationship. He crafts a new circle. He transforms the boundaries of a family. And in this moment He is outside that boundary. Before Jesus is able, as Paul writes in Galatians to make us children of the

promise like Isaac, Jesus must first set Himself apart, both from His own family and from the family of humanity. Even as He is victimized, humiliated, agonizing, even as He cannot breathe, He sets Himself apart and closes a gap between His mother and His disciple.

He steps out of the family to which we all belong and steps closer to a death that only He as God in flesh can experience. This echoes as one of the loneliest moments of the crucifixion. It is profoundly cruel, and it's loneliness for Jesus. It's as if Jesus who is both human and God is a little less human for removing Himself from His own family, from His own mother, and is also a little further from God in that the suffering and death He's experiencing is the furthest He can be from His heavenly father. One of my favorite theologians, French thinker and writer, Simone Weil, writes, this infinite distance between God and God, this Supreme tearing apart, this agony beyond all others, this marvel of love is the crucifixion. Nothing can be further from God than that which has been made accursed. Jesus is the most alone He has ever been in His life, alone in His suffering, alone in His grief.

In our own time, it's not so hard to imagine the loneliness and grief of crucified Jesus. It's been over a year since the coronavirus pandemic began claiming lives around the world. As I write these words, over 500,000 Americans have died, for scale, that's like the total population of Atlanta, Georgia, Kansas City, Missouri, or Sacramento, California. 2.5 million people have died worldwide. Imagine Houston falling into the Gulf of Mexico or sweet home Chicago into Lake Michigan. One in three Americans has lost someone to the coronavirus, according to the New York Times. Not only has the death toll of this pandemic been inconceivably big, but so many of us have lost our jobs, our homes, opportunities for education, our peace of mind. And we've lost one of our most precious gifts, our shared time together. When someone we know or love has died, we've had to scale our grief rituals, if we've had them at all.

When my grandmother died last summer, it was unsafe for me to travel from Boston to the Midwest. I felt like a distant, frozen asteroid orbiting in the cold and stagnant edges of space, far away from the glow of loved ones who we're together yet apart attempting to console themselves. So many of my classmates have lost loved ones and I've had to attempt to observe their grief alone. They've watched as a circle of family closed with them on the outside, they felt that piercing, powerless, sorrow of being alone with their suffering, alone with their grief. The story we tell on Good Friday is not the end of the story we tell of Jesus. But in this moment, in this time, let us continue to dwell in the loneliness and the isolation of Christ, with Christ. It is perhaps in this time a way in which we can be closer to Him than we have ever known. Inhale, exhale.

Holy, awesome, suffering God, you loved us enough to make us. You loved us enough to come and be with us. You loved us enough to give us one another and you loved us enough to die for us. Teach us to love as you love, to use our suffering, to cultivate shared intimacy and humility, to use our resource to cultivate resilience, to use your love to cultivate justice. We ask this in the name of your son, our brother, Jesus, who suffers and dies for us and with us. Amen.

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brother, Jesus, who suffers and dies for us and with us. Amen. Please join us in singing the hymn. Were You There? When they crucified my Lord.

(Hymn, singing).

(silence).

Elizabeth Propst '22

A reading from the Gospel according to Matthew 27:45, from noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon and about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani. That is, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." At once, one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save Him." Here, ends the lesson. This Lenten season, when I close my eyes to pray, I find myself standing alone in the desert outside of Jerusalem. I'm looking up at Christ's body on the cross. It is dark. The air is still and hot and the world is silent except for Christ's agonized, labored breath. In such a place, I cannot sense the light of Easter, just over the horizon. I cannot feel joy at the knowledge of Christ's coming resurrection.

Instead, I feel grief and loss and fury. Fury at the apparently naive hope that any good could come out of such brutal violence. Fury at the idea that the world can only be awakened to injustice by witnessing the pain of the vulnerable. Fury looking at Christ's broken body, and then at the world today and seeing no change. This year, like so many others has been filled with violence and anguish, mass shootings, overflowing hospitals, migrant interment camps, tear gas, hurricanes, wildfires. When Christ's suffering is multiplied, magnified, in the bodies of our neighbors, His lamentation is also magnified. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? You cannot grasp all the possible meanings of these words, but one meaning reflects my own grief and anger.

In this their own grief and anger. In this scene, at three o'clock, Jesus, in his human suffering, feels abandoned. We see a man who has been denied the smallest measure of comfort, who will die an unjust death, frightened and alone. But we also see in these words an essential distinction, Christ suffers, but he does not despair. If Christ truly despaired, he would have remained silent. In the act of crying out, of lamentation, there must be hope. These words tell us that we do not need to hide our grief. Instead, we are called to embrace it and to express it. Christ's words of grief connect him to God and show how we, in our own grief, can reach out of ourselves. And we are reminded that if God did not grieve for us and with us, then Christ would not be on the cross in the first place.

As for the anger that accompanies grief, Jesus gives us a model for that as well. When, during his ministry, is Jesus genuinely furious? His anger appears only when he witnesses injustice being perpetuated, not just by hatred, but by apathy and greed. In his cleansing of the temple or his rebuke of the Pharisees, Jesus shows an anger which is not corrosive or hateful, but which reveals what we are in the light of what God asks us to become and which exhorts us to change. Christ's pain is not just our redemption, but our call to action. Action that cannot wait impatiently for the respite of joy.

We stand in the desert and witness his agony and realize that this is meant to be the last time that we allow hypocrisy and corruption to mutilate a vulnerable body. God has not forsaken us. Let us not forsake each other.

Let us pray. God of comfort, God of sorrow, God of justice, God of loss give us the courage to set aside easy answers and empty platitudes. Give us the clarity to remove any pride, selfishness and contempt from our righteous fury. Give us the compassion to mourn for those who are blinded by hatred just as we mourn for those whom their hatred oppresses. In your name, we pray. Amen. Please join us in singing the hymn, Beneath the Cross of Jesus.

(Hymn, singing)

(silence)

The Reverend Westley P. Conn

A reading from the gospel according to Saint John, chapter 19, beginning at the 28th verse.

"After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said, 'In order to fulfill the scripture, I am thirsty.' A jar full of sour wine was standing there, so they put a sponge full of sour wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth."

In this fifth word, Jesus declares, "I thirst." We need not venture into the details of crucifixion to understand the physical stress it puts on the body, to understand that Jesus is dying and is thus in need of something to drink. The writers of the gospels do not frequently make known any of Jesus' human needs. We are often led to infer other human needs like exhaustion from the crowds, but Jesus never says, I'm tired. Some have approached this fifth word as a metaphor or even a symbolic and spiritual need suggesting that Christ is thirsting for the word of God or that here, Jesus is pointing to his own teachings in the beatitudes where he says, "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness." Perhaps even evoking his encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well where Jesus is the procurer of living water. Yet John's gospel simply says, tucked away in the parentheses, that Jesus said this to fulfill the scripture.

A year into this pandemic, we find ourselves in need of quite a lot, both physically and spiritually. Many of our needs are physical in nature. We long to hug and to hold our beloved family members and friends. We seek protection for our bodies from the virus in the form of masks, social distancing, and now a vaccine. Interwoven with these are the needs of our very souls. So much life has been lost and we are bathed in grief. We are in dire need of repentance from the sins of racism and inequality that have broken bodies and spirits. We thirst. We thirst for the very life-giving waters of love itself.

Shifting between these interpretations of what Jesus means when he is on the cross and says, "I thirst", only leads to more questions. For what does Jesus really thirst? For water? For something deeper, metaphysical? I suppose that if the writer of John's gospel is right and Jesus' words are fulfilling the scriptures, then surely it is the scriptures that hold the answer, that tell us what Jesus means for what he thirsts.

Let us start at the beginning of scripture, where in the beginning was the word and all things came into being through him and without him not one thing came into being. Once in human form, the Christ of God is washed in the waters of the Jordan and of the spirit, then named as the beloved child of God. From here, Jesus leaves a trail of miracles, mysteries, and magnanimous hospitality. Water moves from its natural state to what the party goers at Cana of Galilee call good wine. Evil in all its forms is cast from the afflicted, the alienated and lonely lepers are made clean and filled with praise for God.

Later, the powerful had shut the doors to God's goodness. So Jesus has those in need lowered in through the roof on their mats. With an exclamation of peace, the windstorms that tossed and turned and tumbled lives at sea are no more. Soldiers and people without hope find a healing for their children and for themselves, some simply by touching only the hem of his garment. Death knocks at the door of Lazarus, but through Christ it finds no home there. When all life seemed to be lost, Jesus said, "No, here take this. And when you eat of this bread and drink of this cup, do so in remembrance of me."

So, for what does Jesus thirst? It's clear that physical and spiritual needs are interwoven. We thirst for clean water to drink and for the living water of our souls. The flesh of Christ needed a drink and he will require something to drink to finish what he set out to do, to bind up the broken hearted, to be a dwelling place for the wanderer, to heal, to hope and to love even the loveless, to make on Earth the kingdom for which he knew and we pray. Is this thirst literal or is it spiritual? Is it for wine or water? Well, I suppose we will need to wait until the end of the story to find out.

But from what we know so far, it has to do with the hearers and readers of these very words. It has to do with you and me. That in our need we are to look no further than Christ for the slaking of our thirst. When we thirst, we know that our true satisfaction is found in the one who thirsted first and promised to lead us beside still waters where our cups will flow over.

Let us pray. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for by the cross Christ has made us those people and on the third day, we will indeed be filled. Amen.

Please join us in singing the hymn, My Faith Looks up to Thee. Hymn number 155, found at the end of your online worship bulletin.

(Hymn, singing)

(silence)

Lara Glass MDiv '16

A reading from the gospel according to John, chapter 19, beginning at the 28th verse.

"When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit." Here ends the lesson.

As I hear these words, it is finished, in the context of this current moment, I feel myself yearning. Yearning for those words to be used as it relates to this pandemic, to police brutality, to systemic racism,

to misogyny, to oppression in all its permutations. I fantasize about the relief this would bring, the possibility, the vibrancy. And yet, I know that the purity of this fantastical thinking is impossible.

Even if there were a day in which magically all of these ills were to disappear, it could never erase the past, the present. If the pandemic were to magically end tomorrow, it would not change the fact that we have lost over 2.75 million lives worldwide. If the pandemic were to magically end tomorrow, it would not erase the ways in which those most vulnerable among us have disproportionately become ill, have shouldered the burden of essential work, have died.

When the time comes that this pandemic is passed in whatever incomplete way that is measured, will we have the strength to look clearly at what was lost? Will we be able to resist the urge to reestablish some form of normalcy without tempering that urge with the understanding that business as usual is not enough? Will we be able to have the courage to reprioritize our systems and societies to truly honor life?

When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." What is finished? We know that Good Friday marks a transformation and we see the glimmer of hope of the promise of Easter in just a couple of days. In this way, as with most things that are pitched as endings, there is not a finality. And yet what is finished? Not only in this moment do Jesus' followers not know that Easter will come, but even if they did, something tangible, something specific has still ended. The person that they knew, loved and followed is dead. On this day, we mourn Jesus's death, not only as son of God, but we remember him also in his humanness. We remember his physical presence, that which was lost on this day. Easter has not come yet. Today the loss feels complete. It is finished.

It can be tempting to counter pain with platitudes that someone isn't really gone if they live in your memory, that matter can not be destroyed, only transformed. But to rush into this thinking is to neglect acknowledging that which is in fact no more and never will be again. There is a time for hope, but it is not today. Today, we mourn that which is finished, never to be in the same way again. Today we resist silver linings, narratives of what we have learned in this pandemic. Instead, we acknowledge all that was and is being lost in imbalanced ways. Today, we sit in the painful awareness that not all endings are created equal.

May rage and grief on this day not be tempered by hope, but felt deeply, so deeply that you and I have the courage to be transformed ourselves. May this allow us to better see that which dehumanizes, even as it also glitters with superficial promise. May we look clearly upon the insidiousness of putting security above all else, of individualizing everything so much that we become disconnected, numb, unable to look beyond the narrow bounds of our own particular existence. It is finished. May we sit in the pain of this. May we resist the urge to tell our stories in linear, progressive ways, but have the courage to see what is. To honestly encounter one another, to see the particularity of the person and not only the legacy of their martyrdom. Hope is essential, but hope without acknowledging complexity and paradox is empty and harmful. Today, we mourn. We rage. We hold ourselves and one another accountable.

Let us pray. As we yearn for change, as we yearn for Easter, may we stay present in this moment of pain in community with one another to honor that which is no longer. May we remember those lost not in

abstract, but in their particularity for it is in their specificity in their particularity for it is in their specificity that they were and are each beloved. May their memories encourage us to always seek a better, more just and equitable world. May it be on earth as it is in heaven, amen. Please join us in singing the hymn, there is a green hill far away.

(Hymn, singing)

Aidan Stoddart '21

We're reading from the gospel. According to Luke chapter 23, beginning at the 46th verse. Then Jesus crying with a loud voice said, "Father into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last. When the Centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent." And when all the crowds who had gathered there for the spectacle, saw what had taken place, they returned home beating their breasts. But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things, here ends the lesson.

People often expect preaching to do the work of teaching, but on a day like today, I don't feel like being a teacher. I have no lessons to impart through the words of this sermon. No cheap proclamations, no pithy aphorisms, no blissful promises. I only have to dread invitations to offer you. The first, is an invitation to gaze at something you'd rather not see. The second, is to do the unthinkable in response. Waning are the days of medieval piety in which Jesus was painted, soaked in and spattered with an almost endless stream of blood. Waning are the days of crucifixion devotions, in which human beings sat in churches and stared at gruesome carvings of terrors, almost unbearable to behold. Waning are the days in which we have the stomach to simply gaze at the horror of the cross, yet gaze we should for in gazing at the horror of the cross we also gaze at the horrors of our own day.

And we gaze at the living God who is beaten and bloodied and killed and not defeated. Gaze at the cross with me, let us all of us gaze together, in the company of our new friend, the Centurion, he gazes at the cross. He gazes at the warm blood, trickling down the wood and forming crimson mud on the ground. He gazes at the onlookers, who weep and beat their breasts. He gazes at the dirty corpse, which hangs in front of him, desiccated and suffocated and pierced. He gazes at the crown of thorns, which adorns the dead skull of Christ. He gazes at all of this and his response to what he sees is utterly perplexing. For in the sight of such unspeakable horror, this Centurion has the gall to praise God.

The literal Greek of the passage is striking, it reads, he glorified God. Glorified God, what insanity to stare at a horror, such as this and to respond by glorifying the divine. It is senseless. Does the Centurion and not know the unspeakable tragedy he has just witnessed. Does he not know that he is implicated in the horror he beholds? Does he not know the depth of his own guilt? But he does and still he dares to worship. What could have spurred his praise? I do not know for certain, but I suspected that perhaps the Centurion was astonished and inspired by the last words of Jesus. Father into your hands, I commend my spirit. We would do well to remember how amazing these words are. In Luke's rendering of the crucifixion, there is no despair in Jesus's immediate encounter with death. Rather, he welcomes death with a loud expression of trust and self-giving, he commends his spirit.

He gives charge of it to the father, to the end he empties himself for the sake of others. He does not cling to what belongs to him, but he gives it up out of love. Father into your hands, I commend my spirit. The faith and the generosity of Jesus, persist to the utmost end even in the face of such wanton violence, such wanton horror. I believe the Centurion in gazes and glorifies because he hears this proclamation of the dying Christ. He witnesses an unspeakable horror and he witnesses God, nonetheless moving in it and giving in it and loving in it and he worships the God he sees, who is both living and dying. He worships the God, he himself has slaughtered, it doesn't make sense, it doesn't make sense to stare at horror and glorify God in response. Yet, this is exactly what the Centurion does. For regardless of sense, God continues to give of God's self.

This is a ridiculous and insane mercy, which we do not deserve. I invite us all to follow the path of the Centurion. Let us stare at the horror of the cross. Let us gaze at the horrors of our own day, the pandemic, the violence against marginalized human beings. The collapse of communal trust, the priority of capital and let us do the unthinkable in response to this horror. Let us glorify God not because worship makes sense. Not because horror is beautiful or just. Horror will only ever be horror and worship will never make sense in the face of it, yet we must worship nonetheless, simply because God continues to live. And because Jesus continues to give, even in the face of horror, he continues to commend his spirit for our sake.

In worshipping in the face of horror, we will commend our own spirits, even as we collapse in the darkness of the tomb and our self gift will graft us into that holy body, which lies in the tomb. Lies in it like, Jonah in the belly of the big fish, cold and frail and abandoned and despondent and yet always only beloved. Let us gaze and glorify. Amen. Please join us in singing the hymn, O sacred Head, now wounded.

(Hymn, singing)

(Silence)

The Reverend Alanna C. Sullivan

Let us pray, God of mystery and wonder today we stand at the foot of the cross and we see our savior hanging there. It is so tempting to avert our eyes, to turn our heads, to flip to the last page of this story, because it is too painful to watch. Too much for our hearts to bear. We want to rush to the dawn of breaking on the horizon, however, we must wait, we are not there yet. There is no route to resurrection without first traveling through the shadows of the Valley of death. On this pilgrimage, God, give us the courage and strength to sit in this valley, in which so many of your children dwell. Jesus broke bread with those who are outcast and ostracized. Loved those who are neglected and marginalized. May the grief of this day, not immobilize us, let us remember the hate and prejudice and greed and political and religious agendas that led to his death.

And let us call out against the injustices that we witness in our world today. The Corona virus does not discriminate between persons, yet our society discriminates in who gets the care and resources they need. Holy one, may we respect and value the sanctity and dignity of every human life as Jesus did. May

we lead with compassion and love. Reach out to our neighbors, especially to those who are isolated and vulnerable. We have come the full circle to the beginning of lent, at the cross, we were humbled to remember our mortality and the mortality of those we love, for we are made of dust and to dust we shall return. God reassure us that there is nowhere we can go that you will not be by our side. Today, we find ourselves like the disciples, unsure of where to turn or what might happen next.

We worry for our safety and those we love, we worry for our future. Our world is and will be radically different from what we expect. Let us place our trust in you knowing that your kingdom is coming as a new heaven and a new earth. We are grateful that you are our God who insists on having the last word. And that that word is always a hopeful word, a healing word, a word of life. Amen.

And let us join together in saying the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples saying, our father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come. They will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses. As we forgive those who trespass against us and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever and ever, amen. Will you please join me in singing the hymn, go to dark, Gethsemane. Hymn number 151, found in new worship bulletin online. Hold fast to your hope for God is faithful. Amen.