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.

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable in thy sight oh Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.

Even at the time of his death, there’s Jesus, in the middle. From the time his ministry began, it seems he’s taken the stance of center; a buffer between sinner, tax collector, the sick, poor and helpless, those seeking healing and reconciliation and those whose self-righteous attitudes and adherence to rigid laws without compassion, justice or mercy extend accusing fingers, ready to cast stones of condemnation.

Jesus did teach in temple and synagogue, but more often, the itinerant preacher, sharer of Good News, worker of miracles, stirrer of hearts, collected dust on his feet, his sandals, and the hem of his garment, as he was the living example of how to be forgiving, how to extend perfect love to neighbor, how to be in right relationship with the Creator, in unexpected places and with unexpected people. Use your imagination; can you almost hear the whispers of gossip, the, “How dare he!” gasps from the very proper, and the snide righteousness of the wealthy “politically correct” and pompously religious?

Bear with me as I share this commentary from George Macleod, Scottish soldier and churchman: “I simply argue that the cross should be raised at the center of the marketplace as well as on the steeple of the church. I am recovering the claim that Jesus was not crucified in a cathedral between two candles, but on a cross between two thieves; on the town’s garbage heap; at a crossroad so cosmopolitan that they had to write His title in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek…at the kind of place where cynics talk smut, and thieves curse, and soldiers gamble. Because that’s where he died. And that’s what he died for. And that’s what he died about. That is where the churchmen ought to be and what the churchmen ought to be about.”

On Maundy Thursday, some of us will participate in a service that includes a ritual of hand washing (people are so shy about exposing their feet these days!) The washing is symbolic of servanthood. But what about another kind of handwashing?

Might we consider the indifference with which the crowd acted. So easily and mistakenly caught up in the convenience, as the High Priest Caiaphas, advised, “It is expedient that one man should die for the people.” Allowing the corrupt, unjust, untruthful Sanhedrin to manipulate the system so that business as usual could continue; using fear as a tool, self-righteousness as a weapon, they urged that innocence be disregarded and that the lover of souls be condemned. Along with Pilate, washing their hands of guilt and ridding themselves of a disturbance to the status quo.

I believe Jesus died because he embarrassed the powerful, saw further than the educated, shamed the wealthy, “comforted the afflicted and afflicted the comfortable.” His lifestyle of inclusivity, radical hospitality, peace- making, feeding, healing, and loving made possible by his prayerful connection with the Father, and breath of the Holy spirit, created the perfect human scapegoat. And he was willing to let it be for the sake of humanity…

Are there times when you and I are guilty of, “hand washing” and indifference?

Hand washing that signals giving up, not taking responsibility, turning a blind eye or deaf ear to the suffering of others around us? Allowing the innocent to pay the agonizing price for our indulgences, condemning Mother Earth to a slow painful death because we, rather than being the Stewards, choose to neglect our responsibility? Though in our day and age, in most cases, our indifference is an indicator of our comfort and complacency; not wanting to get involved or deciding that something isn’t our business. With this attitude, it isn’t hard to recognize how this posture allows injustice, abuse, and neglect to continue and increase in too many places in the world today.

Jesus, in the middle…even at our worst, when our arrogance, our indifference, our self-reliance threatens to “nail us”, embraces us, forgives us, provides the example of a new way of life, when we humble ourselves to ask for and receive the gifts of grace and mercy.

If you and I are truly Jesus Followers, we too, must put ourselves in the middle; centering ourselves on Jesus the Christ. Anointed to love and serve, (we are anointed, you know…) willing to stand against the rich, the powerful, the arrogant and judgmental. Jesus didn’t run away, give up, stop praying, even when it seemed useless, pointless; he knew that it was not; and he commended his spirit with is dying breath.

There are a few words that I will meditate on this week and I invite you to do the same: Humble/humility; Forgiveness; Faith; Grace; LOVE. I truly believe that, as did the criminal, if we but ask, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” we’ll most certainly be assured, “Truly, I tell you, today, you will be with me in Paradise.”

Amen

Mjf/4-14-19 W/B