

Haslett Community Church-United Church of Christ
Good Friday- April 22, 2011

A GOOD FRIDAY MEDITATION

Hanging from the cross, Jesus says, "I thirst" (John 19:28). He's a great "spiritual" leader, but on Good Friday, as he suffers on Golgotha's hill, we can't get around the fact that he's flesh and blood. Jesus suffocates, bleeds, and thirsts.

Something in us resists this. It can be much easier to think of him only in "spiritual" terms. Exalting Jesus as a spiritual leader, a teacher of high wisdom and purveyor of noble thoughts, we can keep him floating above the messy details of everyday life. That way he can mean about as much to me as Plato or Aristotle does: impressive and uplifting in his thoughts, but safely removed from my daily world.

But not when he says, "I thirst." With those words, he reminds us, as Christians, that meeting the true and living God always means meeting God in the flesh- God with us in all the particular, grubby, and nitty-gritty details of life as we actually live it.

However, in the Bible to "thirst" usually means for something more than water. In Scripture, to thirst means to yearn or to be desperate with holy desire. At the start of his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matthew 5:6). Blessed are those who so want God's will done on earth as in heaven that it's as if they cry out for water after weeks in the desert. Similarly, the psalmist shouts, "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God" (Psalm 42:2).

The great Christian writer, C. S. Lewis, once pointed out that the usual trouble with us is not that we're bad, but that we're "too easily pleased". We're too ready to settle for the way things are instead of yearning desperately for God and God's reign.

It was holy thirst that took Jesus, God in our flesh, all the way to the cross. He wouldn't be thirsty for water from his crucifixion if he didn't first thirst with God for us. It's a fair summary of the Bible's story to say that God has this *desire* for us. God is determined- from the dawn of creation, through the giving of the law and the teaching of the prophets, down through the coming of Jesus to the sending of his Spirit- *to be with us*. God has this unquenchable thirst to be with us on earth as in heaven.

As Christians, when we say "God" we don't mean some vague and impersonal power. We don't mean some distant, imperturbable divine bureaucrat who mechanically administers relentless natural law from far off eternity. We mean a God who's up close and personal. We mean the God of Israel and the church who refuses to be abstract. The God of the Bible gets angry, makes threats, gives promises, becomes a human being, weeps, sweats, bleeds, thirsts, suffers, and dies. Only the God who cares deeply, personally, and intimately for us does such things.

It's one of the main meanings we have when we say that "*Jesus is Lord*". In Jesus, God is irrepressibly personal, available, and present to us. Other gods don't dare risk getting this close because usually we want to be our own gods and we get rough with any others who would presume to be. That's why distant, abstract, and impersonal deities normally suit us just fine.

But the God revealed in Jesus thirsts for us. This God comes wholeheartedly and without reservation to be with us. You can't get much closer to us than hanging on a cross.

Strangely enough, that's why we often think God is hidden from us. God is actually so close, so intimately involved that we can't see it and would rather not believe it. Frequently, we're blinded to God in Jesus because we assume and prefer that if there is a God other than us, then this God should stay far off, not come close, and especially not naked, exposed, and dying on a tree. Hanging on Golgotha, the Jesus who says, "I thirst" shows blindingly how deep God's desire for us really is.

It's so mighty that it won't be defeated by our blindness, indifference, or hostility. It's so powerful that God will not be put off by any suffering that we heap on any god who is not us. God's yearning for us is so fierce that God is willing to die for us- even at our hands.

As G. K. Chesterton once wrote, "Anyone who preaches real love is bound to beget hate . . . Real love has always ended in bloodshed." On this Good Friday we look again at Jesus nailed to the cross and we see- God is in this mess because God thirsts for us. Amen.

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