

Good Friday

April 10, 2020

The Courage to Witness and Behold

by The Rev. Heidi Haverkamp

“America is the only country where more Christians go to church on Mother’s Day than Good Friday.” This quote comes from Peter Storey, a South African Methodist bishop who served as the white chaplain to Nelson Mandela and other prisoners on Robben Island, fought against apartheid, and spent several years as a professor at Duke Divinity School here in the U.S.

Honestly, I’m not sure many people go to church on either day anymore, but we Americans, it seems to me, do have a tendency to avoid and deny pain. We focus on positive thinking, hard work, and “living your best life now.” We prefer holidays that offer us fun, nostalgia, heroism, gift giving, and feasting. Good Friday offers none of those things.

Human beings, not just Americans, are experts at avoiding pain. Brené Brown writes in her second book: “Our first response to pain—ours or someone else’s—is to self-protect.” We will do just about anything to push away or circumvent feelings—ours or someone else’s—of pain, suffering, and shame. We do many foolish and harmful things to dodge it, numb it, or toss it away, like a hot potato, to someone else. But what if we could sit with those painful feelings for a while, instead of rejecting them?

On Good Friday we witness God entering pain, deeply and completely, in the person of Jesus. God willingly allowed Godself to be betrayed, abandoned, beaten, condemned, and crucified to share in—to sit with—the pain of human life alongside us.

A mentor of mine knew a pastor who was once called in the middle of the night to sit with a family whose young adult son had died of stab wounds. He sat with the parents, who were paralyzed and reeling with shock. But soon after he arrived at their home, the father turned to him with anger and outrage and asked: “Where is God, then? Doesn’t he know they killed my son?” And the pastor, his eyes filling with tears, responded, “Oh, my friend. God is here. He knows, because they killed his son, too.”

