

## **“Suffered Under Pontius Pilate, Crucified, Dead, and Buried”**

June 26, 2016

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*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you.*

**2: Romans 8:1-9**

This morning, I come to you – not only as your Director of Christian Formation and Congregational life and a seminary graduate called to a life of ministry - but also as a person, a simple person, who is walking in a very real place of loss of someone whom I loved very, very much. My grandfather. I suppose it is the work and mystery of the Spirit that my grandfather passes on the very week that I am to preach on Suffering, Crucified, Dead, and Buried – and so I am come to you this morning hoping to meet you in a place that perhaps you have been before too... A place of vulnerability where we wonder with curiosity,

mystery, and a deep sense of longing.... A place in which we get a glimpse of a very real part of this precious gift of life... death. Because as we all learn at one time or another.... one cannot experience the fullness of life without experiencing death.

In our summer study of the Apostle's Creed... we have been called into direct reflection of what these words mean to how we live out our faith or in other words, how do we embody our beliefs? And so this morning, I invite us to into reflection of how believing that Jesus Suffered, was Crucified, Dead, and Buried – impacts how we live and die in the presence of Christ

Up to this point we have stated that we believe in God as father, God as creator, and God as a baby conceived of the Holy Spirit, who brought light to our world. But now, with a sudden shift, we turn our attention to God as One who experienced suffering, pain, death, and was even buried a human burial. We affirm God as One who experienced the fullness of humanity from birth through death - *so that we in our humanity might experiences the fullness of God.*

I don't know about you, but for me the specific mention of Pontius Pilate comes almost as an abrupt jolt in a steady flow of I believe statements. After all, a Creed is not a collection of facts, but rather a profession of faith in God – so why, then, in our statement of faith do we all of a sudden get the specific historical naming of Pontius Pilate? Well for starters, as Brother David Steindl-Rast reminds us in his book *Deeper than Words* our faith *is* anchored in fact. The mention of Pilate functions as a sort of historical timeline for our faith, affirming the humanity of Jesus by placing him in a specific location in our human world. But perhaps even more importantly, the tension of this historical Pontius Pilate in opposition to Jesus sets the framework of leaders of our world both then – and leaders of our world now. We all are placed into certain societal structures, family models, and cultural systems. We all have the power to either influence or be influenced by the human powers of our human kingdom.... but to affirm that Jesus that suffered under the rule of human hands in a system of oppressive powers... empowers us, gives us a voice, and a call for action, to stand up in opposition to those powers. In our reading from Paul, this also comes through as Paul

speaks against these sins of the flesh with an urgency to follow only that of the Spirit and cautions us a people of faith of what's at stake when we follow our human desires over that of the Spirit.

We next name, right out, that we believe Jesus was crucified – however – you might notice there is no interpretation as to what that stands for or what that SHOULD mean to us. Unlike other creeds and theological writings, the Apostle's Creed is unique in that it leaves any theological representation of the cross or crucifixion out of it. But instead the creed simply names it for what it is- Jesus died the death of a criminal. A death that would have included brutal abuse and pain. Furthermore, it was a death sentence reserved for capital crimes inducing shame and guilt. When we state we believe Jesus was crucified – we are saying that the way he died mattered. It mattered that it was by the hands of an oppressive system, it mattered that Immanuel, God with us, experienced true human suffering.

Finally, in our creed we state that we believe that Jesus was buried. It would have been extremely rare for someone who died by crucifixion

to receive a burial and yet all four gospels declare he was indeed buried. This also then, as observed by Steindl-rast, offers the conclusion that in order for Jesus to have been buried meant there would have been a witness to that burial. A witness that would later be able to testify that the tomb contained the body of Jesus but is now empty, a witness that could testify to the resurrection.

These observations bring us back to where we began, how can we embody these stated beliefs? In the way we live out our faith?// Well first, no matter long we live or how old we become...our time here in life is a precious gift – and it is short, so very short. In the death of Jesus, we affirm that death is a part of the fullness of our human experience, there is no escaping it and we shouldn't want to... but it does mean there is no time to waste in the moments we have in this precious life. And what we do, how we respond, what we say, how we live, and how we lead,– matters. Every moment, matters. In the lines of our creed and in the words of our scripture we trust we are being called to a life given to us by God and we are called to live as expressions of God with us,

Immanuel . We must realize there is urgency to action. Action to respond when 49 lives are taken because of bias and hate, action to respond to racial and economic injustice, action to respond to walk in love and to serve selflessly as Christ taught us to do... from birth through death. We are called to live only for the Spirit as a vessel to the presence of God.

Secondly, these lines from our creed affirms that there is nowhere, nowhere that God is not present. God is with us as we hold the hands of our loved ones and say goodbye, God is with us as we tell the victims of senseless violence that they are loved and valued, God is with us as we tell a grieving mother that God suffers right along with her – because in Christ God experienced suffering and death. In the fullness of humanity... we all suffer. We all experience pain, guilt, shame, grief... and while we don't know why these things happen...when we affirm that we believe Jesus was crucified we trust that when we feel pain, God is present in that pain. In the cross we find the ultimate holy unity with God knowing there is no burden too great, no pain too deep... for God

has endured it all with and for us. In Jesus' death we learn that this is not the end of Christ with us – in fact we could not experience the fullness of life in Christ without experiencing Christ's death. We could not experience the resurrection of Christ on Easter morning, without grieving his death on Good Friday.

Finally, we embody our beliefs through our call to witness. Just as those who went against the grain and buried a man who died a criminal death would then later testify that the tomb that was once full and is now empty – so too we are called witness.// we are called to witness to others and to share Christ through both how we live and how we die. We are called to our children to show them how to put faith first, we are called to witness by how we treat and talk about others, we are called to witness to our grandparents to show that future generations come with insight and gifts they never could have imagined, we are called to witness to those who live in poverty by showing them their life is important and we can help.... we are called never grow weary in revealing the fullness of Christ with our brothers and sisters.

Just days after my grandfather experienced the stroke, my family brought him home to hospice care. With family all around him, holding his hand, , the memories began flooding out as we reminisced on all of the laughter and tears we had experienced together throughout our lifetime. This past Monday night, nearly two weeks after his stroke, my family sang old church hymns together when finally, my grandmother (his wife of 73 years) patted his hand and said “rest easy now, Frank, rest easy.” He passed only a few hours later with my mother by his side.

This thin space between life lived fully and embracing death, may just be one of the holiest pilgrimages that One could ever take in life. Death is one of the great mysteries... a mystery that encompasses the presence of God and captures the fullness of humanity. In these tender moments, in the eyes of my grandfather, we experienced the fullness of life and the fullness of Christ. Trusting nothing, nothing could separate us from the unity found in the cross. This holy pilgrimage reminded me of my own agency to use this precious life as a vessel of God’s presence, to remember that God is with me in all moments of our life including

those tender moments of letting go, and most importantly it reminded me of my call to witness and share Christ's love with other in the same way my grandfather was personal witness for me. In this holy pilgrimage I was reminded yet again, we cannot experience the fullness of life without experiencing death. **My prayer for you in life and death you know belong to God. Amen.**