



Richmond Hill Reflections

“Vulnerable Love” (Preached by Rev. James Ravenscroft)

April 19, 2019; Good Friday

Readings: Selected verses from the Passion Account in Luke (chapters 22 and 23)

The cross. It's a powerful symbol. Though early Christians first used the *ichthys* or fish symbol to communicate with each other, the cross became the primary symbol, even when it was still used as a method of execution. Despite that, the cross came to represent that Jesus' death had changed something in us, had redemptive value. I say that without reference to a later dominant view that Jesus somehow died in our place, a perfect sacrifice required by G-d so we could be forgiven. I question that interpretation. To my mind it isn't really forgiveness if it is only given with strings attached. Yet when I look at the cross I still see a powerful symbol of the significance of Jesus' death in my own spiritual life, and not just because his death is not the end but opens into resurrection.

So what do I see when I look at the cross? I see humility. I see a willingness to accept whatever comes in love, rather than lash out in fear. I see vulnerability, the willingness to give completely of oneself, even in what looks like utter defeat. It's the vulnerability Jesus spoke about in parable as the father ran to meet his younger son and later took a public berating from the other son. It's the vulnerability not only shown by the woman who anointed Jesus' feet but by him in accepting her gesture of love. It's the vulnerability of riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, and as we recalled last night in removing an outer garment and washing feet. Jesus lived with an open heart, so much so, in the end he let go of power, revealing the true path of love. To this the cross stands witness.

We often associate vulnerability with weakness but I see it is as strength. It means taking a risk to be fully known as we are. Many of us are afraid to do this. We want to appear flawless even when we know we aren't, afraid we will be rejected if we reveal our heart. But if we don't take the risk then we'll never really know love. We remain isolated and alone, fearful the other person will walk away. It takes trust to be vulnerable, not just in the other person but in myself, trust that I'm worthy of love. The other person expresses vulnerability too as they receive what I offer. In shared vulnerability a relationship grows. Unfortunately fear often grips us instead.

I wonder if this is what Peter is referring to in his first letter when he writes that Jesus accepted our woundedness so we may be healed. Perhaps it's our fear. It was fear that put Jesus there: the fear that pulls us away from each other and makes the systemic injustice of empire possible; the fear of the religious leaders and ruling government that they'd lose power, the same power that kept them distant from others, living off the spoils of oppression. Fear-based need to hold power still keeps us separated, when sharing power, being connected to others, being in community is what living is really about. It takes vulnerability to give ourselves like this. But how else do we make space for relationships, open up the possibility we're loved not in spite of my flaws but because of it? That's who I really am, not the perfection I try to project. Perhaps on the cross Jesus accepted the imperfection we reject. Our fear is lifted when we see we're worthy of the love and acceptance we often feel is beyond our grasp. In loving us fully, Jesus shows us how to open ourselves in return.

This is one thing I see as I look at the cross. I wonder what you see.