



**Good Friday, 2014  
Christ Church Cathedral  
Vancouver, BC**

**John 18:1-19:42**

John's passion story depicts a strangely unemotional Jesus. Unlike the Gospel of Mark showing us a Jesus who asks that the cup of suffering be taken away from him and who cries out from the cross asking God why God has forsaken him, unlike the Gospel of Luke that depicts Jesus interacting both with weeping women along his path to the cross and with arguing bandits on either side of him as he is being crucified, unlike these stories in which Jesus either expresses or is surrounded by so much feeling, John's passion story presents us with a Jesus and with others who express little emotion during the intense events of his betrayal, trial and crucifixion.

For us who live in what can seem like a world on emotional overload, this less emotional depiction of Jesus can be a bit jarring. For the air around us is full of emotion, isn't it? The emotions of those next door or across the world whose plight and pain are covered in newspapers, on television, on the web (the Korean ferry catastrophe being the one with images I cannot now forget). The emotions of a different kind—the ones staged or manufactured in things such as reality television. Yes, it may strike us as a bit jarring or strange to hear John's Passion Gospel tonight—as if we're standing on one side of a piece of glass, looking at something strong and powerful, but at the same time having difficulty emotionally identifying with the one at the center of it all.

And yet there he is: the strong, the powerful one—the one who does not try to rally his sleeping disciples to come to his aid—the one whose presence causes his adversaries to fall to the ground before they arrest him—the one who does not stay silent before Pilate but who declares to Pilate that his kingdom is not of this world and that he is only in the hands of those who will kill him because he gives his permission for this to happen. This Jesus is the one who does not have anyone helping him with his cross but who carries the cross by himself. This Jesus is the one who does not cry out in agony on the cross but who declares

that his life has been made complete there, that it is there upon the cross that his life has found its consummation.

Who is this Jesus and why do we encounter him and no other on Good Friday? Who is this Jesus and what has he to do with us: we who live seemingly in a river of others emotions real and staged, we who live in the emotional context of our own personal and vocational lives, in the midst of which we are not always strong, we are not always powerful, we are not always clear about which way to turn?

A few years ago, I was asked to offer a workshop on baptism within the context of a visiting scholar's speech about the entire movement of the Triduum towards the baptisms that were typically conducted at Easter Vigil. The topic I was given was to explore some of what were called the "personal" dimensions of baptism, which is to say I was asked to help people reflect more personally on baptismal themes and their significance. And so during my sessions I worked with four different baptismal themes. As I went through the first three of these themes—the theme of water and new birth, the theme of dying to our old selves and the theme of being washed with others into Jesus' own washing; when we worked through these themes, people seemed to be engaged. They were with me. But when I got to the fourth theme, perplexity and disbelief darkened the faces of the participants. The fourth theme was this: at baptism you and I undergo a kind of coronation, for we become God's own royal people who share in Jesus' own royal dignity and his regal capacity in and for a new kingdom in which all have dignity and worth. I can tell you that more than one person came up after the presentation and discussion and told me that this was the most difficult piece for them for they could not conceive of themselves as king or queen with the responsibility to create and sustain the realm of God.

This identity is the one we see John's Jesus acting into and giving us on Good Friday. For in his dealings with his disloyal disciples, in his dealings with those who come to arrest him, in his dealings with the Jewish and the Roman authorities, in his dealings with those who put him to death, he is King Jesus, the one whose dignity, gravitas, power and beauty defeat the powers of this world that would have him and us believe that we have no potential, no capacity, no beauty and no power.

King Jesus: the one whose act of grace under fire casts out the bogus voices of others and within ourselves that have told us that the only thing we will ever be are helpless victims, kept that way on account of our own powerful emotions of fear and despair.

King Jesus: the one whose crucifixion secures our identity and our dignity once and for all times and shows us what our dignity looks like—the pouring out of our energy for those God has given us to be in relationship with and the reality that this will come at a cost.

King Jesus: the one who in the midst of all our overwhelming emotions and confusing choices keeps drawing us to himself and to the dignity and beauty of who we were created to be—people worthy to stand before God and others, fully alive, fully human and fully connected to and compassionate toward others.

At times, it is more than we can believe: that God has gained mastery and dominion over the powers that intimidate us and that our true humanity flows from this mastery and dominion,

that our true humanity is to be the kind of royalty that he was and is, pouring out our life as he did for the sake of the world.

Today I would ask that you simply be open to the possibility that the story of this King Jesus and what he means for your life is a story that could be true.

That very phrase is the title of a William Stafford poem that somehow speaks to this idea. The poem is called "A Story that Could be True." It's a story asking us to imagine that who we are and where we come from is a mystery and that despite what the world might tell us about ourselves, we just might be more than we think.

"A Story that Could be True" by poet William Stafford:

(What) If you were exchanged in the cradle and  
your real mother died  
without ever telling the story  
then no one knows your name,  
and somewhere in the world  
your father is lost and needs you  
but you are far away.

He can never find  
how true you are, how ready.  
When the great wind comes  
and the robberies of the rain  
you stand on the corner shivering.  
The people who go by--  
you wonder at their calm.

They miss the whisper that runs  
any day in your mind,  
"Who are you really, wanderer?"--  
and the answer you have to give  
no matter how dark and cold  
the world around you is:  
"Maybe I'm a king."