

Reflection on the Nicene Creed: “For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried.”

By the Rev. Andrew Arakawa,
Assistant Upper School Chaplain, ‘Iolani School
Deacon Associate, St. Mark’s Kapahulu

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried.

Significantly, the above statement ends with a period. It is not the first period we come across in the Nicene Creed, nor is it the last. It comes in the middle of our communal declaration of faith and holds the tremendous weight of a full stop. The pause that the period brings to the end of the statement above is our Holy Saturday.

Holy Saturday is meant to be a time when we fully live into the pain, suffering, and rawness of Good Friday. Holy Saturday, however, is often overlooked in our practices as Christians. The narrative usually follows that we recognize the passion, crucifixion, and death of Jesus on Good Friday. Then the next morning, the altar guild shows up to prepare for the Easter Vigil. We move from death to life without taking the essential pause needed at that moment for reflection. Boston University Assistant Professor of Theology, Shelly Rambo, in her book *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*, writes that “Religious scholars across a range of theological perspectives –from Walter Bruggemann to Alan Lewis to Cornel West—recognize the dangers in reading death (cross) and life (resurrection) in this particular configuration. This thrust towards life can foster Christian triumphalism and supersessionism.”¹ Rambo goes on to say, “such a depiction runs the risk of glossing over a more mixed experience of death and life.”²

¹ Rambo, Shelly. 2010. *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*. 1st ed. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press. Pg. 6-7

² Ibid. Pg. 7

Suffering, pain, and sorrow are complex. To take on the stance that we are a resurrection people without pausing for reflection has the danger of casting out a callous “get over it already,” statement in the face of human tragedy and trauma. In the summer of 2017, I did my Clinical Pastoral Education hours at INOVA Alexandria Hospital in Alexandria, Virginia. One patient was diagnosed with stage four cancer and was beginning the process of deciding the direction of his treatment. There was sadness, anger, and fear in his eyes. He did not say much. It was his well-meaning wife that kept a steady stream of positive platitudes flowing around her husband. “We have to keep a positive attitude.” “This is all going to work out, and we have to trust.” “Everything happens for a reason.” As much as his wife was working to keep my patient's spirits up, he was in Holy Saturday; new life had not come yet. His whole demeanor presented an individual that needed to scream, cry, yell, and cry some more. He was not being given the space to bring his authentic, open, broken, and raw self to God. To perhaps, even rage furiously against God. Instead, his well-meaning wife was essentially telling him to get over it already.

It is often difficult to imagine bringing our authentic and imperfect selves before God. Our society honors perfection and self-reliance, and as such, we project that expectation onto God for us. We are told, however, in the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9-14) that God wants us to bring the fullness of our being—warts and all—to God. The period at the end of the statement—that *for our sake he [Jesus] was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried*—is our pause, our Holy Saturday, our time to beat our breasts and bear witness to our brokenness, the brokenness of others, and the brokenness of our world. Being in Holy Saturday is not always easy. In her book *Listening, Thinking, Being: Toward an Ethic of Attunement*, Lisbeth Lipari writes on the weight of bearing witness to the suffering that exists in the world. She tells the reader about her experience of attempting to re-

read Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man* and being unable to do so. To get through the book, she got to a point where "I [Lipari] had to stop less than a third of the way in because the text was too painful—the humiliation and degradation recounted with bitterness and irony were simply more sorrowful than I could bear. I couldn't keep reading. It was, for me, like all those war movies that rip the mythic façade off of war to reveal its true insanity and terror."³ Lipari goes on to write that for her, a large part of the difficulty with Ellison's book is that it became a call to conscience, "Ellison's text called on me to witness his pain and suffering—to not turn away, but to listen and respond. To become responsible."⁴

As followers of Jesus, we know how the story ends; we are resurrection people after all. We know that we have been freed and opened to life by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We proclaim this truth in the Nicene Creed, and right in the middle of our declaration we pause in that Holy Saturday moment where we are called to bear witness—to not turn away—and to take responsibility. The period at the end of the statement guiding this paper is the eschatological tension of already, and not yet, it is the place of hope in which we as Christians live. It is vital that we find the places in our lives to pause and recognize the already and not yet tension that Quaker educator Parker Palmer calls the Tragic Gap, holding the vision of our lives saved by Christ alongside the realities of this world.

³ Lipari, Lisbeth. 2014. *Listening, Thinking, Being: Toward an Ethics of Attunement*. University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press. Pp. 177-178.

⁴ Ibid. Pg. 178.

Work Cited

Lipari, Lisbeth. 2014. *Listening, Thinking, Being: Toward an Ethics of Attunement*. University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Rambo, Shelly. 2010. *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*. 1st ed. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press.

Follow Up Questions

1. Where are areas in your life where a Holy Saturday pause is needed?
2. How can you be open to recognizing in the various spheres of life you live in (family, work, community), where you can hold the pause for others?
3. Is there a prayer practice that you can take on to help fortify you as you live in the Tragic Gap?