Good Friday Reflection
April 18, 2025
The Rev. Timothy Ensworth



"Golgatha" by Gebre Kristos Desta

on a painting by Gebre Kristos Desta

Blood.
Blood red,
battered, scattered, splattered.
Is this what we do best,
build cravenly cruel machines --
crosses and guillotines,
gas chambers and nuclear submarines --
to batter and scatter and splatter
blood?

Blood.
Blood red,
blood of Ukrainians and Syrians and Armenians,
Cambodians and Palestinians and Jews,
three thousand New Yorkers and forty thousand Nagasakians,
millions of indigenous Americans and
you.
Your
blood.

Blood.
Blood red,
brightly, brilliantly red.
Battered but vibrant,
scattered but electric,
splattered but pulsating with life.
Life is in the blood.
Life is in your
blood.

Is this what we do best? Hang nooses around necks? Point rifles at chests? Inject veins with potassium chloride? Mobilize armies and drop bombs heedless of the damage, intended or collateral? Answer any threat with lethal force?

The Romans of two millennia past were especially good at it. Execution by crucifixion was an act of public torture, an act of public humiliation — emphasis on the "public." It was intended to terrify and pacify, to shock and to intimidate, to put the fear — not of God, but of the empire — into the heart of every man and every woman. The cross was the preferred punishment for rebels, for insurrectionists, for any outsider daring to challenge Roman sovereignty.

But in Jesus' case, the execution failed to yield its full effect, because Jesus died too quickly. Victims of crucifixion could agonize for hours and hours, even days, before succumbing, but Jesus was dead within three hours. He died quickly, not because his body was particularly feeble, but because his work was done. "It is finished," he said.

It is finished. Jesus' work was completed. The Roman empire did its best, the Jewish authorities did their best, all of us have done our best, to rid the world of the one whose words pierce the heart, whose ways expose the folly of our ways. But we all failed. In Jesus, love was embodied. In Jesus, God was embodied. In Jesus, the light has come into the world and we can't unsee it. We cannot go back to being as we were.

It is finished. Jesus did what he set out to do. His death did not thwart his mission. Rather his death was the culmination of his mission: the mission to obey God, to follow the path of obedience all the way, all the way to death on a cross. Giving himself up, giving his life up, was the ultimate act of love, of love for God, and of love for us, for all of us.

Jesus embodied love, love for each of God's creatures, one by one by one, and love for God, intimate, passionate, pure, unwavering, God's way his way to the end. In dying, Jesus proved his love true, rather than make a lie of his purpose by saving himself.

It is finished! Jesus obeyed God all the way. At last, a human being has perfectly fulfilled the law of love. At last, a human being has faithfully manifested the image of God that is planted in all of us. At last, the human vocation has been fully realized. At last, a human one has pleased God and, in and through and by him, humanity has pleased God.

And so we will never be the same. We cannot go back to being as we were. What we were has died with Jesus. We are granted now the freedom to fulfill the law of love ourselves, to manifest the image of God planted in us, to realize the human vocation by loving God and loving each other. The power of sin — destructive and self-destructive, constraining and disfiguring — has been irrevocably broken. And soon, soon, the power of death will be broken, too.

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