
A Reflection on The Veiled Cross

By Polly Tangora for Lent 2024

As we entered into the season of Lent, we marked our foreheads with a cross of ashes and are reminded that “you are dust and to dust you shall return.,” and called to reflect on our own mortality as we prepare for the death and resurrection of Christ.

In our sanctuary the star that led the magi to seek the king has been dismantled, stored away, and replaced by a veiled cross hanging from a crown of thorns. Lent is a time when in our church school classrooms (called atria) we remind the children about the “great light” that the prophet Isaiah spoke of, the light we know came into the world when Jesus was born, and how there was a moment when that beautiful light went out and Jesus, our Good Shepherd, died. But we know that light could not be overcome by the darkness. It came back, even stronger than before in the RISEN CHRIST.

Years ago, during Lent, one of our atrium children prayed:

“Dear God...We are sad for who died, but happy for who rose. We know it is Lent and what is coming. Amen” -Owen, age 5

During Lent I think the image of a veiled cross helps us think about both that darkness and the light that on Easter morning will overcome it in the great Alleluia rising out of the tomb (or wicker basket in our case) .

Right now, you can't see the cross clearly through the veils but you know it's there, hanging over our heads, the part of the story we'd rather not think much about. That Jesus the Good Shepherd, deliberately sacrificed himself to save us, to repair the covenant God has been offering humankind over and over again.

What is coming . . . During the first half of Lent this year we have heard in the gospel of Mark about the wondrous works Jesus does as he travels first in Galilee and then toward Jerusalem. Things are going really well. He's feeding thousands both with God's word and actual bread, he heals and teaches. When Jesus asks his disciples “But who do YOU say I am?” Peter identifies him as the Messiah without hesitation. But, when Jesus tries to explain more than once the great suffering, rejection, and death that is coming and how, three days after his death, he will rise, his friends are mystified. They can't believe their beloved friend would put himself in that kind of danger, would deliberately give up his life. And they definitely can't imagine what this rising from dead could mean.

At one point Peter takes him aside and according to Mark “began to rebuke him.” (Mark 8:31-38) Can't you just imagine Peter's advice “Listen Jesus you really shouldn't talk like that, nobody wants to hear that, it sounds really crazy. After all you're the Messiah, “the anointed.” Look what you've accomplished so far. And rising again in three days, what is that all about? Maybe we shouldn't go to Jerusalem for the Passover this year, we could always wait and go at Pentecost.” But Jesus is having none of it, “Get behind me Satan.”

The cross may be veiled for the disciples (and us) but Jesus is very clear about what's coming. Over and over, Jesus tries to prepare his friends but, until they actually experience it, the cross will remain veiled. Something they kind of suspect but aren't ready to confront. John D. Small, points out, “God is not conformed to human expectations or desires, for God is found in uncertainty, danger and suffering . . .precisely where human wisdom perceives God's absence.” (Daily Feast, Year B p.184)

In this year's lectionary we also listen to the Old Testament stories of covenant, of Noah, Abraham, Moses, the Decalogue, each a promise of love offered by God, then broken by us over and over again. How we break them, and how God continually repairs what we have broken.

We'd rather ignore that too. But there it is hanging over our heads, just on the edge of our vision, calling us back to ask God's help once again to repair our broken world, repair us. The cross is always there, even though veiled, reminding us that we have work to do so that we too can share in the day of resurrection that is coming.

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Best Day ever!