

29 March 2024, Good Friday
St. John's Parish of Newtonville

Isaiah 52:13-53:12
Ephesians 1:3-14
John 18:1-19:42
Psalm 22

Love Hurts

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Tonight, we are confronted with the extreme pain and suffering that humans can experience, and, worse yet, that humans are capable of inflicting on one another. Historically, Christians have turned away from this by placing blame for the Crucifixion on "the Jews," Pilate, and/or the Romans. The fact remains that the Crucifixion holds up a mirror to humanity, exposing to us the parts we don't want to see. We are capable of, have inflicted, and continue to inflict unimaginable pain and suffering on one another.

One of the questions the Crucifixion brings to the fore is why God Incarnate would endure this. Over two millennia, theologians have tried to answer this question with all sorts of theories of atonement and salvation. The answer, or at least an answer, though, might be simpler.

In *The Shack*, the protagonist, Mack, is grappling with the horrific murder of his young daughter. Wracked with pain, Mack accepts the invitation to spend

a weekend with God. He discusses the Crucifixion with “Papa,” God the Father, whom he sees as a Black woman.

“How can you really know how I feel?” Mack asked, looking back into her eyes.

Papa didn’t answer, only looked down at their hands. His gaze followed hers and for the first time Mack noticed the scars on her wrists, like those he now assumed Jesus also had on his. She allowed him to tenderly touch the scars, outlines of a deep piercing, and he finally looked up again into her eyes. Tears were slowly making their way down her face, little pathways through the flour that dusted her cheeks.

“Don’t ever think that what my Son chose to do didn’t cost us dearly. Love always leaves a significant mark,” she stated softly and gently. “We were there together.”

In the Incarnation, God gives Godself into our hands, trusting us to love and care for our Creator. Christ’s Passion and Crucifixion confront us with how

profoundly we failed at that. If we can torture and murder God, what are capable of doing to one another?

Yet, God doesn't give up on us, not even to spare Jesus, and thus God, this pain. God doesn't love for us only to take it back later, not even when we do terrible things despite that love. No. God sticks it out with us, continuing to love us even when our worst is on display. God's love for us is just that deep, even when loving us hurts in indescribable ways.

Jesus, of course, experiences love's hurt in an extreme way, but others in this story also experience that love hurts. People who love Jesus, including his mother, stand at the foot of the cross. Witnessing this horror hurts precisely because they love Jesus so much, but their love also motivates them to endure that pain because they won't leave Jesus to die alone.

Joseph and Nicodemus show love by risking personal harm to care for Jesus' body. I can't imagine what it must have been like to remove Jesus from the cross; to wash his body, seeing and touching each horrifying wound; to wrap the lifeless body of their beloved; and to bury him expecting never to see him again in this life. Painful probably doesn't begin to describe it. Their pain, too, is born of love, the same love that motivates them to care for Jesus despite the hurt.

Love – genuine, selfless, complete love – hurts. But that is not the end of the story. Yes, this evening we witness horror; we witness our worst. But we also witness the undying, unshakable, immovable love that God has for us, and we witness the powerful love we are capable of when we accept God's love and reflect it in the world.

God, through Christ, shows us that love does, indeed, hurt. But in Christ, God also shows us that, despite the hurt, love is worth it. Love sustains. Love spreads. Love always leaves a significant mark. And even though we may only be able to see in this part of the story that love hurts, the story, our story, doesn't end there. It ends with this truth: Love wins.