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Good Friday Sermon
Christ Episcopal Church—Outdoor Worship
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When my kids were younger, I would get asked every year... “Now tell us again why we call this day, the day of the crucifixion, Good Friday?” I still struggle to articulate an answer for that question because the cross is a paradox. It is a mystery that I believe we continue to wrestle with as we try to make sense of the brutality of this day. How do we understand that the cross, while being a symbol of sacrifice, is also a symbol of love and of hope?

Richard Rohr, a Catholic theologian who has helped me to understand the meaning of the crucifixion claims that Jesus’ death, his sacrifice, is not about substitution but about solidarity. Jesus suffers and dies in solidarity with all the suffering in the world... since the very beginning of time. His violent death acknowledges the violent ways of humanity and all the ways we hurt each other. How does the cross save? It may sound like a contradiction, but the violence of the cross calls us to a better way. That call and our answer will be our salvation.

In his book, *Jesus as the Forgiving Victim*, James Allison writes of the cross as a symbol of love. On the cross, Jesus is saying, “This is how I prove my love to you: by taking you at your very lowest and worst point and saying ‘Yes, you do this to me, but I’m not concerned about that, let’s see whether we can’t learn a new way of being together.’”

Learning a new way of being together. Jesus knew that humanity will only be saved by love, not hate. By relationships that see the other as a reflection of God, deserving of our love—not relationships that dehumanize the other and make violence acceptable.

We see this in the words that Jesus speaks from the cross. He must have been in great pain and talking could only have brought more pain. And so those last words would have been chosen carefully. And what he spoke there at the very end were not words of hatred for those who were responsible for his death. They weren’t words of rebuke for the disciples who had betrayed him, denied him, or simply run away in fear. They weren’t words of revenge, calling on his followers to retaliate in violence. None of those things. Instead, they were words of love and relationship.

In John’s Gospel, Jesus looks down from the cross and sees his mother, her sister, and Mary Magdalene. And he reaches out to them—if not physically, emotionally. He uses his last breaths to speak words of comfort to these women who love him, who stand at the foot of the cross unable to save him or even to comfort him in his suffering. The beloved disciple was also there, standing next to the mother of Jesus, bearing witness to that moment.

And Jesus looked down from the cross and said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.” Then he said to the beloved disciple, “Here is your mother.” And the disciple took her into his own home.

Jesus was teaching, even here at the end, the way of love—the way of relationship. He wanted the women and the beloved disciple to grasp onto relationship and love in the face of despair. He knew that their grief would be unbearable, but he didn't want them to stay in it forever. He didn't want them to live only in their grief and anger. Jesus wanted them to live in love.

Richard Rohr claims that it is relationship that is our salvation. And he describes *salvation* as simply the readiness, the capacity, and the willingness to stay in relationship. Even when it's tough. Even when you're grieving. Even when it seems like your world is crashing in around you. He declares, "We really were made for love; outside of it we die very quickly." In this moment of drawing Mary and the disciple to each other, Jesus was showing them that love would be their salvation.

So in the darkness of this night. In the despair that might bubble up for us as we look around our world and see that not much has changed since the death of Jesus. Pain, suffering, injustice, and violence persist. Let's remember that even the crucifixion cannot kill love. And acknowledging the violence of that cross, the violence that humanity is capable of, calls us to a better way. And so the cross is a sign of hope for us. A call to choose love in spite of what we know of the world. A call to give witness to the loving relationships that it was possible to build even at the foot of the cross. A call to live into our own loving relationships, even across differences and barriers, and choose a different way, the way of love. Amen.