Good Friday April 10, 2020

Jesus and his disciples crossed the Kidron Valley and entered the garden at the foot of the Mount of Olives where they often met among the olive trees.

By the time of their arrival, Judas had informed the authorities. It didn’t take long to bring soldiers and police, with weapons and lanterns and torches. Confronted by this show of force, and not flinching, Jesus comes forward, secure in his self-worth, willing to confront his accusers and his enemies. According to John’s gospel, he was so confident, so without fear, that the soldiers and police stepped back and fell to the ground when he identified himself as the one they were seeking.

Adding to the disturbance, Peter foolishly takes a sword against an overwhelming force, and for some unknown reason cuts off the ear of the slave of the High Priest.

Throughout the narrative, Jesus keeps his own counsel. He remains true to himself. His integrity brings on the cruelty of the Roman empire, intent on quashing any dissent, finding traitors in large numbers in the occupied land.

The gospels record that Jesus was crucified at 9 o’clock in the morning, dying six hours later, six hours of intense suffering, suffering he shares with other perceived enemies of Rome. We have learned to say that Jesus is God. A more accurate understanding is that we see in him the perfect union of the human and the divine natures, a union we share with him through following.

From birth to death, his humanity is evident. He annoyed his parents; he was tempted; he wept when he heard that Lazarus, his friend, was ill and on the verge of death; he wept over Jerusalem for its refusal to keep the covenant with God. He was justifiably angry at the corruption and cruelty he witnessed. He was often exhausted by travel on the dusty roads. And he was loyal, even when abandoned by his friends, assuring that they were let free when he was arrested in the garden. He shared human despair, crying out from the cross the words of psalm 22: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.” But even in his distress, he comforts the robber next to him, promising that they will meet again in Paradise.

Jesus was one with God and he was one with humanity. Devoted to the God whom he called Father, he did not take himself too seriously: he was focused instead on those whom he sought to teach about eternal life and those he sought to cure. It was not about HIM. Always, he pointed to God the Father.

With the world experiencing common vulnerability to a virus, we can learn the lesson that we are all one in our humanity. We are all the same. No one is more important than anyone else.  Powerlessness is the beginning of wisdom, as the Twelve-Steppers say, and as Paul wrote so eloquently and paradoxically, “in my weakness is my strength.” All we can finally do is pray that we allow the flow of the Spirit’s presence within us. If there is no living water flowing through us, then we must pray for the desire for it to flow! Once the desire for something more is stirred and recognized, it is just a matter of time. Nothing less will every totally satisfy us again.

It’s not about whether we go to heaven or hell. We have little control over that. And, though we worship a Trinitarian God, Jesus never asked to be worshipped; he asked to be followed, even on the road to the cross.

There is something holy about suffering and death, something which adheres to our grief, the wonder that a beloved person can be here one moment, and gone the next. Death amplifies the precious gift of life. John’s gospel proclaims “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” Today we remember that this was done for us.