

Good Friday, Year C | April 15, 2022  
Isaiah 52:13-53:12 | Psalm 22 Hebrews 10:16-25 | Psalm 22 | John 18:1-19:42  
The Rev. Leeann Culbreath, preached at St. Anne's, Tifton

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I have with me what's called a holding cross, or comfort cross,  
that I sometimes take with me to hard things,  
like hospital visits and funerals and  
appointments where there might be bad news.  
It it contoured to fit a human hand.  
I also keep it in my pocket or purse during the Easter Triduum,  
these three sacred days leading up to the feast of Easter.  
We are smack dab in the middle of it now,  
in the moment when these days pivot  
from drama and passion and shouting voices,  
to stunned silence.

This little olive wood cross,  
supposedly from the Holy Lands,  
got a good workout  
during the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic,  
in another difficult pivot,  
as the country came to a grinding halt.  
The familiar routines evaporated.  
I remember going through my calendar  
and methodically deleting almost everything,  
making those little squares a garish white.  
I felt disconcerted and bereft.

Good Friday stirs up  
a similar feeling for me,  
with the sanctuary stripped bare,  
and the reliable signs of God's presence here  
gone faster than you can chant Psalm 22.

The feeling, overall, is desolation—  
like looking around for soft comforts and signs of life  
and seeing only hard edges,  
and open, barren spaces.

The prominent presence is absence.

*What, next?*

*Is this the end of the world as we know it?*

*Who am I, now?*

In times of desolation,  
it's hard to get bearings,  
spiritually and emotionally,  
because the guideposts  
have disappeared.

I can't imagine the wrenching desolation  
the disciples must have felt,  
and the Marys,  
and so many enthusiastic followers  
on that day at Golgotha.

New followers had been coming in droves,  
abuzz with hope after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.

Only days before, Jesus had arrived in Jerusalem  
with fanfare, surrounded by crowds cheering *Hosanna!*

They shared an intimate meal in an upper room,  
with bread, water, wine—  
all the signs of life!

And then,  
the hopes, expectations, plans,  
and even confidence in their own survival  
drained rapidly,  
as Jesus' blood poured out.

I wonder if they had the  
very human sensation of a  
thick fog descending close around,  
in every direction,  
so thick that there is no clear way forward.

Every step could lead to a crash,  
or off a cliff,  
but standing still is not an option.

God seems far away, somewhere beyond the fog.

Jesus' lament, *My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?*  
expresses what it feels like to be  
in a truly God-forsaken country of the soul,  
a spiritual geography of aching emptiness.

When it felt like this to me, in the early lockdown days,  
I grabbed this cross,  
and I gave some to friends as well.  
I needed something to grip—  
to ground me  
to be a channel for my anxiety,  
to grasp onto instead of groping at air  
to find a way to get on with life.

The cross was like a kind of compass in my hand  
that gave me some blessed orientation.  
It helped keep me moving and trusting  
that God was making a way for me and for the world  
beyond the fog.

Have you ever felt like this?  
Have you traveled with trepidation  
in this God-forsaken country?  
Perhaps you are there now,  
following a tragedy, a major life twist or failure,  
an illness or a diagnosis,  
the death of a loved one.

If you're not and you haven't been,  
you probably will.  
It's just the way life goes  
in a broken and sin-soaked world.  
Sometimes all you can do in those places  
is hold on to the cross—  
a physical one or one in your heart—  
and trust that your clinging  
and the prayers you press into it,  
will keep guiding you through,  
even if just a few short, visible paces as a time.

When the light begins to push through  
and the fog lifts  
*(and it will!)*  
and a gracious expanse opens up,  
you will see  
that the precious, wounded  
body of Jesus  
was holding YOU  
all along.