

Year C, Tuesday in Holy Week  
Isaiah 49:1-7 | Psalm 71:1-14 | 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 | John 12:20-36  
The Rev. Leeann Culbreath, preached at St. Anne's, Tifton

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Those of you who know me  
know that I love a good protest.  
If there is a cause for justice  
that I feel strongly about,  
that aligns with the Gospel,  
I will break out the thick Sharpies,  
up-cycle an old piece of cardboard  
for a bold sign  
and make myself hoarse  
singing and chanting  
while waving that sign somewhere in public.

If you know my husband,  
you might wonder  
how such a nice peanut doctor like him  
got mixed up with such a rabble rouser.  
The only signs he makes  
are for fungicide trials!

Whether you are protester or not for any cause,  
and whether or not you believe in the  
ability of protest to effect social change,  
there is something undeniably powerful  
about a group of human beings coming together  
with shared concerns,  
pooling their energy toward a common desire,  
crying out with one voice  
in song or chant.

One of my favorite protest chants  
has been around for decades,  
and is now also use for clever cartoons and memes.  
The chant goes:  
*What do we want? [goal]*  
*When do we want it? NOW!*

I saw a parody cartoon today  
that seemed to fit the church:  
*What do we want? Change!*  
*When do we want it? Never!*

All joking aside,  
this demand of NOW!  
carries with it so much raw emotion,  
an urgent scream of the heart,  
a foot stomp of frustration  
and a fist pump of defiance.

IT IS TIME TO DO THE THING.  
NOW.

That word, *now*,  
should be ringing in our ears  
not just because I've said it a few times,  
but because it shows up  
in this short passage from the Gospel of John four times,  
and *hour*, as in "the hour" or "this hour"  
is used three times.

*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*  
*Now my soul is troubled.*  
*Now is the judgment of this world.*  
*For this reason I have come to this hour.*  
*Now the ruler of the world will be driven out.*

This is the conclusion of Jesus' public ministry.  
Throughout the Gospels  
we hear him say,  
my hour has not yet come,  
soon it will be time,  
*you're getting warmer!*  
The truth is, Jesus had been waiting  
since the dawn of Creation  
for this NOW,  
*the now of salvation and reconciliation.*

Here we are, now,

on this Tuesday in Holy Week,  
in the year of our Lord 2022.  
It is interesting to me  
that we still use that phrase,  
“the year of our Lord”  
because it suggests  
an important truth  
for those who follow Jesus.

*Jesus' NOW*  
*is still now.*

Yes, the events we remember this Holy Week  
were historical events  
and recalling, retelling, and reliving them in detail  
are essential for our faith.  
But it's not only in church  
or one week a year  
that we can experience  
the pain, passion, and love  
of in Holy Week.

Because we hear these stories  
from the other side of the Resurrection and Ascension,  
we have an understanding that  
Jesus is not confined to one physical body  
or one physical place  
or even to time.  
All of the salvation history  
that God has been writing, so to speak,  
is still being written today  
in the lives of human beings and in all creation  
because Jesus is present  
in all places and times,  
suffering, forgiving, comforting, healing, redeeming.

The urgent, decisive *now*,  
that Jesus declares in this Gospel,  
a day or two before his death  
reverberates throughout time and space  
and in our lives, this parish, our community and world.

Jesus continues to suffer now  
in all those suffering in any way from the sins of humankind,  
including our own sins.

Jesus is crucified again and again ...

—in Ukraine as innocent people hide below ground  
and suffer unspeakable torture and death,

—as a black man is lynched while jogging

—in a falsely accused person on death row,

—in swaths of land razed for profit.

Jesus still suffers pain, rejection, loneliness, false accusations ...

—as asylum seekers are transported  
in shackles on wrists and ankles for 10 or 20 or more hours  
to an immigrant prison in Georgia,

—in schools where children are bullied,

—as local children sit in a DFCS office with all their possessions  
in a black garbage bag,

—in homes and institutions where the sick and elderly suffer and die alone,  
sometimes because they cannot access adequate healthcare.

Jesus is present **in** crucified and suffering persons and communities NOW.

And, through the incredible mystery of His Life, death, and resurrection,  
Jesus is also **with** those who suffer now,  
present to their anguish and physical pain,  
with spiritual presence  
and working through others to bring  
comfort, healing, justice, and provision.

Where are you now?

Where are you in these Holy Week scenes  
we hear in the Scriptures,  
and where are you  
as they play out around you  
in your life and in the world?

Are you a curious bystander?  
Are you a friend, staying close through it all?  
One who turns away?  
A bereaved mother or sibling?  
The one who hammers the nails  
or mocks or jeers?  
The one who tends to the body  
of the one suffering?  
Are you the one suffering?  
Some or all of the above?

Jesus is here, now, and we have a chance to draw near  
in the suffering of the world  
and in our own suffering.

So often, though, we don't,  
for many reasons,  
some good, some bad.  
Okay, mostly bad.  
Mostly sin.

Gratefully, the help we need  
comes from Jesus Himself.

What grace do you need  
to respond to, or endure,  
the scenes of crucifixion and suffering  
in the world?  
From what do you need to repent?  
What keeps you at a safe distance?

To use the old protest chant  
in a different—but no less urgent—context:

*What do you want from Jesus?  
When do you want it?*

If you responded "now,"  
Jesus is already meeting you.

Unlike at a protest,  
when people cry to the government or courts  
for justice or help  
and it is interminably slow in coming,  
when we cry out for grace and forgiveness,  
there is an immediate response.

We receive what we need to draw near  
to our suffering Savior,  
unafraid, unashamed.

Right here, in this little chapel  
in Tifton, Georgia,  
the response is  
in the form of bread and wine,  
in the prayers that free us,  
and in the faithful people all around us  
who support, encourage, and love us.

Receive it.  
Don't push it away.  
This is a great gift:  
In all of the hardship  
and horrors,  
Jesus is here,  
NOW.