

“When the Hour of Darkness is Upon Us”

Isaiah 52:13-53:12; John 19:1-37

The Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens
Senior Minister

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From the Pulpit

The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ

444 East Broad Street, Columbus, OH 43215

Phone: 614.228.1741 • Fax: 614.461.1741

Email: home@first-church.org

Website: <http://www.first-church.org>

A meditation delivered by The Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister, The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Good Friday, April 3, 2015 dedicated to the memory of Janice Carol Jones and in my love for Kevin Jones and Joe Bellissimo and their grieving family, to all Jews who enter Passover tonight and All Christians who stand at the foot of the cross and always to the Glory of God!

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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We stand at the foot of the cross in the face of senseless suffering. How can Hope be expressed in the face of such suffering as this?

In his book, *Night*, survivor of the Holocaust and Nobel Peace Prize winner, Elie Wiesel relates this story that happened to him as a 16 year old prisoner at Auschwitz:

Today, the SS hung two Jewish men and a boy before the assembled inhabitants of the camp. The men died quickly but the death struggle of the boy lasted half an hour. “*Where is God? Where is he?*” a man behind me asked. As the boy, after a long time, was still in agony on the rope I heard the man cry again, “*Where is God now?*” and I heard a small voice within me answer, “*Here he is – hanging on the gallows...*”

It is difficult to speak of this horror. It is difficult to speak of the horror of the cross. But, it is critical to remember that God is not the executioner. God is not the mighty tyrant. Between the sufferer and the one who causes his suffering, between the victim and the executioner, God is on the side of the sufferer. God is on the side of the victim. God is being hanged on the gallows. God is dying on the cross (reference to Dorothee Soelle, “On the Gallows, “from *Suffering*, transl. Everett Kalin, Philadelphia, PA, Fortress Press, 1975).

But what about the child hanging there? What about the son of God hanging there? We too easily say, “*He is with God. He is in heaven. He has been raised.*” And when we say these things, a cynicism settles into the souls of the speaker and even more into the souls of the listeners.

Followers of Jesus and anyone else listening, hear only the sounds of suffering unto death.

Tonight, we should all get out of the way.

Listen to the Centurion in Mark who proclaims, “Truly this was God’s son.” Listen to young Elie Wiesel, “Here is God – he is hanging here on the gallows.” You see, every one of the six million who died in the Holocaust was God’s beloved son, God’s beloved daughter. On this night when Passover and Passion meet at the gallows, we are called to listen. Listen to the cries of those –every one of them God’s son and daughter – who suffer unto death at the hands of torturers, murderers and tyrants. Tonight, we need to listen to the cries of refugee children in our war torn world, listen to women, men and children screaming in pain from abuse and neglect – unto death.

Tonight, God is not in Heaven. God is on the Gallows. God is on the cross. God is in the tears of everyone who suffers now. And God’s Love is not other-worldly or beyond us in heaven. Love is on the gallows, too. Love is hanging there as well.

And now it ends – this suffering unto death. Our young man, hanging there, gives up his life and says to us, and to any who will listen down through the ages, “It is finished.” He gives up his Spirit. As he dies, he dies for and with all beloved sons and daughters of God who have come before him and come after him – suffering unto death.

And then he is gone.

Where is God now?

Here he is – he hanging here – for us – with us.

Behold, the hour of darkness is upon us.

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