

Good Friday, April 18, 2025

John 18-19:42

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In many ways, reading John's account of the passion needs no more words...so I will only say a few.

I reflected on this Gospel, which reflects the Johannine community, dated about 70 years after the crucifixion. The lines from the spirituals that we would be using for refrain reminded me of comments from Sean Copeland African American theologian, who explained that when African American people sing of the cross, they are remembering that enslaved Africans sang because they saw the one who on the rugged wooded planks had endured what was their daily portion. Enslaved Africans sang because they saw the results of the cross ...triumph over the powers of death... triumph over evil in this world.

Other black theologians have commented that black Christians believe that just knowing Jesus went through the experience of suffering in a manner similar to theirs gave them faith that God was with them, even in suffering on lynching trees, just as God was present with Jesus' suffering on the cross. The cross became a symbol of resistance. Scholars like Elizabeth Johnson point out that crucifixion was a particularly horrific way to die and was reserved by Rome for noncitizens, giving them the message to obey or this will happen to you too. The cross is the main symbol of Christianity for a reason.

...it is a testament to the presence of Christ in the events of all peoples who struggle against darkness and domination by political and religious powers.

John's passion shows STRUGGLE.

Struggle in a garden with primal human interactions, betrayal, violence, struggle with power in the dialogue between Pilate and Jesus, and struggle with the life force itself in crucifixion.

Most of all, though, I find myself immersed with the exchange between Pilate and Jesus and what it says for our time and possibly what it asks of us. Jesus is given due process and engages Pilate in a most profound dialogue ... dialogue about identity and truth. Multiple dialogues are going on in some ways. We are in the trial as the passion of Christ evolves over the ages. Where do we stand in the drama.... with the betrayers, the soldiers, the religious authorities, the state, the women?

I think of Kilmar Abrego Garcia and his companions, lost in an El Salvador prison. What does the passion going on now ... all around us... Call us to do?