

8th Sunday Trinity

Romans 8:26-39

30th July 2023

May I speak in the name of God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Sometimes words fail us.

An event occurs and we are left speechless, unable to articulate with any degree of accuracy or propriety the emotions which have been elicited as we process the moment we're experiencing.

There are times where this is the result of a moment of great joy; the first time we hear one whom we love tell us that they love us, the moment when we first see our intended on our wedding day, the occasion when someone whom means the world to us tells us they are proud of us, or perhaps even an accomplishment of our children and grandchildren who have achieved so much in the face of their particular adversities. Perhaps it has simply been the perfect moment of contented happiness and all you can do is soak it in and treasure it in your heart.

Other times we can be rendered silent through means of tragedy; witnessing an accident which causes injury or even death, hearing the painful request of "I want a divorce", or finding out that a loved one has died. There are moments where instead of words we find ourselves feeling hollow, and numb with a twisting knot in our stomach as our minds which are so often filled with thoughts and words are suddenly empty with a dull blankness.

Sometimes these moments are unexpected, but other times they creep up on us with a slow and steady sense of inevitability; particularly when it comes to issues of health or finances.

Whatever this has looked like for you in your own life, whatever your struggles might be, it's an uncomfortable reality that sometimes we don't have the words to express what's going on. We don't know what to say or how to explain things, or even how to ask for help.

-

Yet sometimes we might manage a simple question; a question asked of parents by small children which

somehow grows in complexity throughout life, becoming the biggest of questions despite being the smallest and simplest of words: Why?

Just... why?

Why are things hard?

Why is this happening?

Why are these things happening to me, to us?

Why would God do this? Why would God allow this?

Just.. why?

There's a great temptation for those of us who hear this question to fill the void with platitudes, with pithy sayings or logical reasons and explanations.

Sometimes that can be helpful, but often to respond in such a way, to desperately fill the void with noise, is to miss the opportunity for the most powerful answer of all:

Presence.

When you're all alone with the whole world against you there's nothing more helpful than having someone by your side.

Too often we can respond to the problem of evil and the question of suffering with logical tautologies that can spin us round in circles. We can say that if God is good and God is powerful then he has the power to prevent evil; and so if there is evil, if there is suffering, then God is either not truly good or not truly powerful; and if God is not truly good or powerful then he's not truly God. And yet if he's not truly God then everything unravels and all we are left with is meaninglessness and the present suffering nevertheless remains.

Yet the Gospel sidesteps that entire question; when God sees suffering he doesn't spin through a perpetual cycle of logical tautologies. No, he moves in love and steps into the world in Christ Jesus and in so doing embraces our lives, our human experience of pain, sorrow, sadness and despair and he holds all of this together in his own body as he heads with grim determination to the cross where he shall embrace the full weight of death and sin, and drown in the worst of human nature such that there is no suffering we can experience to which he is a stranger. Whether we grieve for loved ones, whether we know the taste of sickness in our bodies, or have seen the horrors of violence or war, or have been victims of injustice or

have been physically violated or shrouded in the fog of despair, God in Jesus Christ knows our hearts and he knows our wordlessness and our question, such that even the Son of God asks that same question from the Cross: *eloi eloi lama sabachthani* - my God, my God, Why have you forsaken me?

Why?

Impossible as it may seem, the son of God dies upon the cross. Impossible as it may seem, the curtain which shields the holy of holies from the eyes of mere mortals is torn in two, and on that day the full weight of the human condition threatens to tear apart the very heart of God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

What happened in that moment for God is not described in the scriptures. It's as if there are no words, for the Word of God has died.

Likewise we do not see in the scriptures the moment of the resurrection. The central moment upon which our salvation and our redemption is founded upon, happens 'off camera'. The scriptures make no speculation, but simply describe the subsequent moments of encounter

and discovery: between the women at the grave, the apostles in the locked room, and the disciples on the Emmaus road.

Even here we find the Gospel presents us with a God who steps into our lives and reveals himself to us even in the midst of our grief, our fears, and our confusion. That is, in the midst of our weaknesses.

Yet although we do not hear what happened in that moment of resurrection, we can imagine, we can deduce certain things which must have happened.

Jesus' body lay in the tomb, surrounded by silence. Yet in that wordless space the love of God the Father for his only begotten son was present in the Holy Spirit; the Lord, the giver of Life and that self-same Spirit breathed new life into Jesus. This was no resuscitation such as Lazarus experienced where he returned to a life which would one day again die. No, when the heart of Jesus began to beat and he gasped in that first breath of air he breathed in the beginning of a new life which shall never again be touched by the anchoring stain of death. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus was resurrected to eternal life.

Likewise, the Holy Spirit who entered the wordless silence of the grave, enters our wordless silence when we do not know how to pray.

When we are acutely aware of our own weakness, the Holy Spirit of God intercedes within our hearts with sighs too deep for words. (R8:26)

When we ask “why?” God responds by being present within us, even and especially when we are not sure of his presence.

As Paul writes, “And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.” (R 8:27)

This is the power of God within us, that God knows us and the depths of our hearts and all that we experience and rather than being disturbed by the living death he finds within us, he brings the full force of his divine love for his Son Jesus which prevented him from abandoning Christ to the grave and draws us into his presence, into his love, conforming us to the likeness of his Son that we might also be his Children.

This is a powerful message, one which when we grasp it firmly within our spirits draws us from wordless sadness to inexpressible joy. It's this Joy which makes Paul's words run away with themselves with confident excitement:

*We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also **predestined** to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. 30 And those whom he predestined he also **called**; and those whom he called he also **justified**; and those whom he justified he also **glorified**.*

*What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against **us**? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.*

Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written,

'For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.'

*No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am **convinced** that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in **Christ Jesus our Lord**.*

What love is this that we encounter in the presence of God? It is a love far greater than any comparison we can present, a love which is defined on its own terms, a love by which love finds itself not redefined but most truly and fully defined. We can say with John that God is love (1J 4:16) because we know that this love is seen in the face of Jesus Christ our Lord. This love is not an abstract amorphous and idealistic concept, but is fundamentally rooted in the physical reality of Jesus' human body which for our sakes hung upon the cross and out of God's love

for us in his Son was resurrected to eternal life by the same Spirit who lives in our hearts even as Jesus physically lives and intercedes for us today.

Because of this it is only right and fitting that we should have a tangible sign of this promise set before us today. For when we bite the bread and taste the wine which are for us the body and blood of Jesus Christ our Lord we are reminded that no matter the challenges which we face during our mortal lives here on earth, God's love is with us, sustaining us and feeding us with his own love for us by which we are forgiven, healed, redeemed and declared to be his children.

Let us eat and drink, and be *convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (R8:38-9)

Amen.