

“God does not hide God’s face from us,  
but hears us when we cry out.” AMEN!

There are a few parts of the long passion  
reading from John that leap out and beg for us  
to think about and meditate upon during  
this sacred night.

The first is the truth that Jesus spoke  
while in the garden in the Kidron Valley.

When the cohort of soldiers came  
looking for the “Nazarene.”

You see, our Bibles add Jesus’ name there  
for clarity but the soldiers said to Jesus  
that they were looking for “the Nazarene.”

Jesus knew they were looking for him  
so he answered, “I am he.”

Not only once, but twice did  
Jesus speak this truth when a lie could  
have saved his life.

This part of the story amazes me  
because intimidation often works on me.

If a show of force presents itself  
I find the temptation to lie  
to get out of the jam.

Had I been Jesus and the soldiers came  
asking for the “Nazarene,”  
I would have stalled them.

“Which Nazarene?”

Or maybe even said,  
“We’ll let you know if we come across one,  
have a good night!”

I would have gone that way...

Yet, Jesus did not dodge nor stall.

And I marvel at what enabled him to stand up to them,  
not with clenched fist, but  
with humility and power. (Pause)

The Rev Dr. Susan Smith writes that she  
“imagines a certain space,  
a moment’s interval,

between the soldiers’ demand and  
Jesus’ response:

a certain space from which there  
arose grounded freedom,

the [kind of] freedom that abides in truth.”

He did not fudge it a bit. ‘I am he,’ Jesus responded.

I think that this is a key teaching point.

In the midst of confrontation, anxiety, or fear  
there is a space between whatever is  
threatening us and our response to it.

It is a subtle and often brief space that we  
want to be invited in to NOT miss.

The space is a *non-event* between  
what is happening and yours (or my)  
response to it.

This in-between time was where  
Jesus lived fully and consciously.

His answer flew in sharp contrast to  
the second part that leaps out for us.

The denials of Peter...

Peter’s denials in John are a little different

than the other gospel reports.

In John, the woman, the group of people,  
and the slave of the high priest ask,  
“Are you one of his disciples?”

In the Synoptics: Matthew, Mark, and Luke,  
they ask “Are you with him?”

For John’s gospel report,  
we find that Peter denied his own identity.

His identity of being a disciple of Jesus.

Peter’s proclamation stands in sharp contrast  
to Jesus’ acceptance with “I am,”

Peter declared “I am not.” (Pause)

Finally, the third part of the passion story tonight  
from John that leaps out is that in his account  
we are told that some who loved Jesus  
were near the cross.

Jesus’ mother, Jesus’ aunt,  
Mary the wife of Clopas, Mary Magdalene and  
the disciple whom Jesus loved.

This unnamed disciple is often assumed to be John,

but we don't know that for sure.

We just know that it was a man because of  
what Jesus told his mother and this disciple.

He said "Woman, here is your son.  
Man, here is your mother."

"And from that moment on he took her  
into his own home,"  
the Bible communicates.

But, this should not be just discounted  
to mean Jesus' mother simply had a room  
built on the beloved disciple's home  
in order to just live inside.

He "Took her into his home" meant that in  
the moment of grief, anguish, and  
feelings of helplessness at the place of  
a brutal execution.

In the moment of realizing these actions committed  
by a brutal force, an angry mob, and the  
result urged on by ugly and  
merciless religious leadership -

even in that moment a  
new union was being created.

The beloved disciple brought Jesus' mother  
into the community of relationship  
that was new to her and

she brought the beloved disciple into  
a relationship that was new to him, too.

One where she is mother over him.

You see, grief and loss heighten our  
need of connective-ness. (2X)

Our deep need of connection with God and  
connection with each other. (Pause)

God hears when people cry out...

What are you crying out for?

Good Friday gives us the space to cry out.

To cry for awareness of the space  
in-between threats and our responses to them.

To cry out for strength to be truth-full,  
instead of truth-less when it comes  
to confirming our identity as  
a disciple of Christ.

And to cry out to each other, and to God,  
so that we stay connected and  
build new/stronger relationships  
with each other.

For this is something that also occurs in John.

Important events occur in gardens.

Truth, violence, healing, and arrest occurred  
in the garden where the soldiers  
encountered Jesus and

Jesus' body was placed in a garden  
where there was a tomb.

In fact the "garden places" book end  
tonight's passion reading.

Gardens are places of community,  
friendship, death, and new life.

Tonight we stay in the liminal space of death.

We won't rush through it, nor will  
we skip quickly to this Sunday.

Let's not rush to be full.

It is still Friday.

We feel it,  
notice it,  
experience it,  
let it speak its truth to us.

Not alone, but in community together and  
available to each other and for God.

Tonight is not a dirge that simply  
cries out in grief or despair.

No, tonight is like Psalm 22,  
tonight is a lament,  
a crying out to God,  
while fully knowing that God is  
in our midst and will intervene  
and rescue.

AMEN!