

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

No Day But Today

Epistle Lesson

Romans 5:6-11 (NRSVUE)

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. ⁸ But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. ⁹ Much more surely, therefore, since we have now been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. ¹¹ But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Bible/Sermon Focus

Crucifixion was not a dignified way to die. The historical accounts of crucifixion on a cross describe shocking physical violence, unimaginable pain, and raw shame. This is the death Jesus died. It hurt. It took hours. And it was brutal to witness.

In her sermon, Pastor Winter said, “We bedazzle and gold plate our crosses to hide the truth, the horror and the shame that came with crucifixion.” We seem to have an aversion to shame. And that makes sense, of course. We tend to avoid things that hurt or make us uncomfortable. We place high value on dignity.

The Broadway musical “Rent” is set in the late 1980s, when the HIV/AIDS epidemic was nearing its peak. There was no dignity in a death caused by AIDS. The illness was violent, and painful, and for years it carried the weight of stigma and shame along with it. Being in a group, a community with others living with HIV/AIDS empowered people to express their deepest fears, “*Will I lose my dignity? Will someone care? Will I wake tomorrow from this nightmare?*”

Two of the characters in “Rent,” Roger and Angel, live with HIV/AIDS. Pastor Winter contrasts their responses, pointing out that Roger simply waits to die whereas Angel approaches life with exuberance and compassion, embracing each moment as another moment to be alive. Angel’s death dramatically impacts the community, causing each person to ponder ways to “measure a life.”

*In truths that she learned,
Or in times that he cried?
In bridges he burned,
Or the way that she died?*

*Remember the love!
Measure the seasons of love.*

The death of Angel helped those around her overcome so much, and live more fully together in relationship with the world and one another.

Christian tradition teaches that the crucifixion of Jesus was followed by resurrection, overcoming the power of death. Last weekend, Pastor Winter said that the physical death of Jesus was not the only thing Jesus overcame in the crucifixion. He overcame shame. He overcame the communal trauma of an occupied people. He overcame the “small, everyday graves” that confront us each day.

“He lifted up those that the world belittled over and over. Christ gave them, gives us, a different way to see our lives, a different story to claim and a different song to sing, one that recognizes our value as children of God,” Pastor Winter said.

In this way, followers of Jesus share in his death (and his life) not by dramatically overthrowing entire systems. Rather we participate in “daily, moment-by-moment acts of solidarity with what is good and what is right.” We live into our baptismal vow to “resist evil, injustice, and oppression” through such actions.

Thanks to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we do not measure our value by productivity or by how well we fit into an artificial “mythical norm.” We measure our value in “Seasons of Love.”

Discussion Questions

1. How comfortable are you thinking and talking about the crucifixion of Jesus?
2. Contrast the two characters Roger and Angel from the musical “Rent.” What is the difference between “dying from” a disease versus “living with” a disease?
3. Reflect on this quote from this week’s sermon: “Compassion and empathy are powerful tools of the Holy Spirit. And the arts have a way of making space for her scared breath to dance between us and enter our hearts. To transform us. To transfigure us.”
4. What gives a life dignity according to the standards of the world? What gives a life dignity in the eyes of God?
5. Share with the group a story of how a particularly impactful death changed you.

Prayer

Divine Creator, You form us in your image, and you call us good. We often forget that our dignity comes from you, from the simple truth that you made us and you love us. Forgive us for succumbing to the grind culture that values people based on productivity or appearance or some other worldly measure. May our measure be always and simply, your divine love. Amen.

"I'm not really afraid of dying and I think I can handle suffering...but the thing I think about all the time is will I lose my dignity?"