

Good Friday
April 14, 2017
The Rev. Jamie Samilio

Sacrifice

1. Out early for lunch, 1130, and the air is still a little cool, not yet baked between the sun and the cement of the downtown DC streets—there is nothing like a hot wind blowing across baked cement. I am out early because if I want to get a sandwich and head for a seat in the garden of the church, I need to be in line sooner rather than later, and I have a lunch order for my co-worker who will meet me in the church yard under the cooling trees. I see a homeless man and I cross the street, not willing to sacrifice a dollar I may need later for a Starbucks. (Anon.)

2. One day the phone rang late in the afternoon. My sister decided, against all advice to try and drive her spare junker of a car to Pennsylvania. She and her friend were safe at a rest area, they had AAA, and I had other plans. I was not going to sacrifice my evening so she did not have to ride in the stinky cab of a tow truck, and then take a taxi home. I hope spending the extra \$50 taught her not to be so penny wise and pound foolish. I mean, I love my sister and would do anything for her, but this was one sacrifice that I was not willing to make. (Anon.)

3. It is dark, and snowing, and very cold. I heard on the radio that the bus service had stopped. We were at a traffic light when a woman knocked on the car window and asked if we could take her home. It was cold and it was snowing and she was alone in the dark. “Don't trust her,” my friend said. If you let the stranger in the car, I'm going to get out and walk.” So I apologized to the woman and drove on, leaving her in the cold. I was not going to sacrifice my friendship to help some strange woman. (Anon.)

4. I was so looking forward to my trip to the West coast. A co-worker offered to drive me to the airport after work, and I gladly accepted the ride as lugging a suitcase on the metro is a pain, and taxi fare can be expensive. “How dare those people cut in front of me, I am not going to sacrifice my place in line, I was here first! This traffic is ridiculous. Look out! I am not letting you in, can't you hear my horn?” ranted my co-worker as she weaved in and out of traffic. “This is taking forever.” And, for the next 45 minutes, she droned on and on about the traffic. When I collected my suitcase, and leaned in the window to thank her, she asked if I needed a ride home in a few days. I told her, no thank you, I would work it out. I would rather make the sacrifice and take a taxi, then hear someone complain how difficult it was to help me out. (Pamela Godsey)

5. I want a new phone, I want a new suit, and I am not willing to sacrifice either. (Anon.)

6. The day before I was leaving on a family vacation, I got a call asking if I would swing by and pick up my Grandma – it was a full hour out of the way to pick her up. No way I was starting my vacation stuck in a car with her and listening to her drone on about her card club, and grilling me about my social life. Someone else was going to have make the sacrifice this time, I had suffered more than once hearing how Grandpa used to take the other road, or that I need to slow down, and could I please turn off that noise. (Anon.)

7. What in the world is sacrifice? How did I get here? Who have I become? What is truth? When did going to church for one hour on a Sunday become the sum total of my worship of God? These days, the other 167 hours of the week seem to represent my worship of the material world, around which I am centered. (Anon.)

8. I tried to purchase spirituality, reading this book or that. I lit candles, and practiced yoga; I even did a 5K run for the hungry, yet still I am empty, something is missing, and I just don't get it. What have I done to deserve this emptiness? I have pursued happiness exactly as I have seen it modeled in movies, on TV, and by people I see everywhere. I have made myself my number one priority, and I have not sacrificed my dignity or integrity by doing anything that is beneath me. I have been true to myself, yet I am lost, and I am cold. While I have the wealth of the world to surround me, I am spiritually impoverished. I go to

church, I work hard, I take care of myself, yet I am empty. What more sacrifices can I make? What is it that I am missing? What did Jesus sacrifice? (Anon.)

Jesus the human said it himself, He need only command it and legions of angels would come and stand against the Romans and the crowds. What lesson would we have learned from Jesus of Nazareth if He had chosen that path? We would learn that power overcomes all, and that commanding power is the end-all of our pursuit of happiness. I am fairly certain that humans already know the lessons power has to teach us, as they are lessons of human construct and not heaven sent.

No one wants to talk about sacrifice, not really.

Even the human Jesus, the man from Galilee, knew that being crucified was going to hurt. Jesus the man was afraid of experiencing that pain, and even asked if the cup could pass him by, but he knew what he had to do. Jesus endured a whipping, a crown cutting into his head, the humiliation of being stripped, and nailed to a cross -- all because He loved us, believed in us. Sacrifice.

“What would it be like for a human to engage in such spiritual warfare and bear the sins of the world? I can’t even bear my own sins. What would it be like to love and trust God and us so much that He could make that sacrifice? Especially when He knows we will bollox things up—in the short term anyway.” (Phil Long, Holy Cross)

If you have sacrificed something that was very meaningful to you for a greater good, or suffered a profound loss, you may have noted that loss and sacrifice have something in common. Although it is often difficult to see, sacrifice and loss both leave room for hope. Hope of restoration, hope of salvation. "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more." Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

“In John’s Gospel we hear of the invalid who had come to the pool at Bethzatha to be healed. The man could not find anyone to carry him to the pool because it was the Sabbath. Jesus directs the man to “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” The man did so and was made well.

This seems a rather different heavenly intervention from the typical Old Testament God—commanding, demanding and creating for His people. Jesus is one of us. As a fellow human being, Jesus gives the lame man work to do before he is made whole. Jesus doesn’t ask the man for lock-step obedience or the sacrifice of many bulls—He asks the lame man to do impossible work: to “Stand up, take your mat and walk.”

In each of Jesus’ eight miracles recounted in the Gospel of John, Jesus asks a person to do work to accomplish the miracle. In Cana at the wedding, Jesus asks servants to fill the water vessels. Healing the official’s son, Jesus tells the official to turn away and walk away. When distributing the loaves and fishes, Jesus tells the disciples to pick up the crumbs that turn into the loaves and fishes. When Jesus walks on water, He tells the disciples to help Him get on board the boat. Jesus tells the blind man to bathe in the pool before his sight is restored. Jesus tells Martha to remove the stone from Lazarus’ grave to view the living Lazarus, and Jesus tells the disciples to physically cast the empty net on the other side of the boat before it can be filled with fish.

Jesus asks more of us, perhaps, than the God of the Old Testament. He is not necessarily asking us to obey the many laws and commandments and sacrifice cattle; instead, He is asking us to pitch in with Him to do the often difficult, real work of advancing God’s kingdom on earth. Jesus made it sound simple, leaving us with only two commandments: Love the Lord your God, and Love your Neighbor as yourself. But it is rarely simple to love God (all the time) and our neighbors (all of them). And it often requires very difficult work. However, in our daily life, full of the complexities of finances, politics and relationships, Jesus has reduced our theological complexity to His two “simple” commandments. If we do the often difficult work of loving God, all the time, and loving our neighbors—all of them—God promises to join with us in performing the miracles that will change us and our world forever.” (Carolyn Buser, *2017 Pathways Through Lent*, St. John’s, Lafayette Square)

Perhaps, if I spent all of the 168 hours of my week loving God, and engaging in the work that Christ gave us to do, I might find that the empty space in my soul, filled. If I try, perhaps I can make time to do the work that I have left undone. Maybe then I will better understand the magnitude of the sacrifice Jesus made for me. Jesus thought that I was worth His sacrifice. Jesus thought that we, all of us, were worth His sacrifice.

Out of love for us, patient, kind, love that rejoices in the truth. Out of this love, Jesus sacrificed himself that we might live, and continue His work in the world—work by Him, and in Him, and with Him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Let us walk in love, as Christ loved us, and gave himself for us, a sacrifice for the whole world. Amen

(My words this evening were a collection of thoughts, stories, phrases, passages, and questions that crossed my path while contemplating my Good Friday message. They were unattributed in the reading, but annotated in this print copy.)