

Proper 24, Year B

- One of my son Elias's favorite lullabies is "Were you there when they crucified my Lord"
- If you're looking at me strange for saying that, or think that's weird, I want you to hold that thought for a minute while I explain
- May hear Loren tell this story - bc it's actually her story
- One of the things that has been interesting about our lives is the nature of being a clergy couple, esp. where I've been in parish ministry and she's been on diocesan staff
- Both work in the church, but the rhythms of our lives in the church are different
- This was perhaps most obvious this past Holy Week, when our son Elias got sick, and so he couldn't go to day care, couldn't really have a babysitter - so Loren, my lovely wife, who's been a priest for a decade now, had to stay home with him rather than go to Good Friday services
- So, for the first time that she could remember, she wasn't able to be there for Good Friday, the crux of Holy Week and the Easter Triduum, one of **the** defining moments of our faith - and instead was home, comforting our sick son
- But she couldn't not observe it - still had to mark the occasion because of its importance, had to do something to honor the gravity of that day
- So as she sat there that day, rocking Elias to try to get him to sleep, so he'd feel better, she started to sing - sang him a song that he hadn't ever heard before, a rather unlikely lullaby - "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?"
- And I don't know if it was just that the song spoke to him, or that the gravity of the moment was conveyed, or what - but y'all: he **loves** that song
- It's become one of his favorite lullabies - and while we don't sing it every night and sometimes weeks will pass without him asking for it, just when we think he's moved on, that that hymn is no longer in his bedtime rotation, he asks for it again
- So it has stayed one of the most unlikeliest of lullabies - I'm sure, at first glance, some people can't imagine singing that song to a child
- But it's a story I'm glad to tell him in song - the story of the crucifixion - the story of how our Lord died
- It's a story we only truly hear in Church twice a year - once on Palm Sunday when we hear it told through that year's synoptic Gospel - Mt, Mk, or Lk - and then again on Good Friday itself in John's words - the first time we're spectators, part of the crowd - second we're invited into the mystery, walking with Christ to the cross

- And then, once that week is over, it's almost like we say, "good enough" - we've heard that hard story enough, so let's move on to happier things
- But it's a story we ought to tell more often, a story we need to hear more often - the story of how our Lord died
- That's the story that we say Isaiah's prophecy that we heard this morning is foreshadowing
- That passage that maybe is just a bit familiar, as it's the one we read every year on Good Friday
- "Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."
- That sounds like a sad, even a depressing story - it's something we tend not to think too deeply about, something we even maybe avoid thinking about, right? - it's why people give the look that they do if they find out one of my son's favorite lullabies
- We think it's an unhappy story! - but the truth is that there isn't one happier in our faith
- Especially given that some stores have already put out their Christmas decoration, you might be thinking, "I don't know about that, Christmas is a pretty happy story..."
- But it's only on the cross that we come to understand what Christmas means - if God was made flesh and had a relatively normal and easy life, then how much comfort would that really be?
- That would be about as helpful as a friend who hears about a tough time you're going through, says they know exactly what that's like, and then describes a situation that is much milder, one where you would trade places with them in a heartbeat - God love 'em, but that's the worst kind of friend in that moment, isn't it?
- Jesus wouldn't do that to us! - our God was made flesh and experienced every bit of what that entails - the joys and the tragedies, the pleasures and the sufferings - and in the end, even death on a cross
- And Jesus did all that for us - he has borne **our** infirmities and carried **our** diseases - he was wounded for **our** transgressions, crushed for **our** iniquities
- Jesus descended all the way to the depths, with us. and for us. Our Emmanuel, our God-with-us, truly **is** with us, no matter what we're going through - our experience cannot be God-forsaken!

- And that alone is supremely good news, but what's more, we **know** the story doesn't end there - know it continues on through to Easter, and to the resurrection
- Even that hymn I mentioned goes on... our Hymnal, to make it a proper Good Friday hymn, ends with the verse "were you there when they laid him in the tomb"... but not where it usually ends
- Last verse varies somewhat, but usually something like, "were you there when God raised him from the tomb"
- Because God has been with us in the depths, not only are we not alone in facing them, but we know that they can't last - Jesus has conquered death, has crossed to the other side and will drag us there, too, is dragging us there already
- One of the great thinkers of the early Church, Gregory of Nyssa, said that Jesus "stooped down to our dead body and stretched out a hand... He approached so near death as to come into contact with it."
- And because he has taken our suffering upon himself, we no longer have to bear the weight of it
- "upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed."
- Much the same sentiment that appears in one of our Eucharistic Prayers: "By his blood, he reconciled us. By his wounds, we are healed."
- There's a reason the cross has come to be the symbol of Christianity, why it's the most prominent symbol in our liturgy, why even when we talk about the 'crux' of a story, the word we're using there is the Latin word for cross - because this is the crux of our story, this is the moment where we are shown, once and for all, that God is with us, no matter what
- And we are shown that there is nothing, no power on this earth, capable of overcoming us, because God has conquered even death
- That is what the story of the cross means
- And it's a story worth telling ourselves, again and again