

Good Friday
15/4/2022

Mark the Evangelist

Numbers 5:1-10
Matthew 27:24-26,32-54

Holy, Holy, Holy!

Sermon preached by Matt Julius

*God, may my words be loving and true, and may those who listen discern what is not.
Amen.*

We have learnt over the past two years that the world is filled with fragile bodies.

The pandemic and war; fires and floods; famine and drought.

Set against this is the chronic call of justice for marginalised people, whose bodies continue to be bound, imprisoned, and disposed of.

And the call too on behalf of the Earth's own fragile body: the natural order stands on the precipice of catastrophe; all the world's experts unable to tame the insatiable drive of death pushing us over the edge of a cliff.

We have learnt that our bodies do not end at the boundary of our skin.

My body extends out to what I aspirate, and to what I discharge.

Bodies have become news items, with regular reports of case numbers, death rates, and sewage detections of viral particles.

Our common humanity has been revealed as a common fragility in the face of an ambivalent natural order, and forces of death which hold our common life in their grip: ambivalence, greed, hatred, prejudice, self-entitlement, trauma.

Fragile bodies captive to the forces of death become corpses.

Into this contemporary experience we are in *this* place to hear again the story of the corpse of God. We hear this story in a year where we have had to navigate the risk of disease; where we have lost loved ones - some without the grace of a final touch. Even today we may be in aching bodies; aware that as we gather for worship to hear the sounds of scripture and song, around the world others hear the sounds of gunshots and bombs.

Fragile bodies captive to the forces of death become corpses.

And corpses defile.

Hear these words from the law:

“... put out of the camp everyone who is leprous, or has a discharge, and everyone who is unclean through contact with a corpse; ... put out both male and female, putting them outside the camp; they must not defile their camp, where [the Lord] dwells among them...” (Num. 5:2-3)

In the framework of the ancient Jewish law, the Torah, the holiness of God must be set apart from the defiling forces of uncleanness. These sites of uncleanness remind us of the constant spectre of death which looms over humanity. Leprous skin that evokes the paleness of corpses, discharges which mark our life force leaving our bodies, and above all corpses themselves. The power and holiness of the living God cannot stand the presence of these spectres of death. The source of life can have only umbrage with death.

So it is that the Rabbi Jesus, who is called the Holy One of God, is led out of the camp, towards the cross ... to the place they call the skull ... to become a corpse.

“This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.”

This is the defiled one, whose corpse will surely become a defiling presence -- unable to stand in the presence of the living and holy God.

As he is becoming a corpse Jesus calls out: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Set outside the camp alone, Jesus gives up his Spirit - breathes his last: his life force discharged from his body.

The Holiness of God must be set apart from the defiling forces of uncleanness: the spectres of death. The source of life can have only umbrage with death, seemingly even with the corpse of God’s own beloved child.

Holiness stands against death.

And yet ... At that very moment ... At the point of death itself ... As the Holy one of God has his very life snuffed out, his fragile body crushed and beaten, pierced and bloody ...

Time collapses in on itself.

Is this not the Holy One who healed those with leprous skin?

Is this not the Holy One who cast out the presence of evil spirits?

Is this not the Holy One who healed the woman with the discharge of blood, the One who raised even the dead?

At the point of death the holiness of God explodes out from the cross itself

The curtain in the temple that kept uncleanness *out* tears, no longer able to keep the holiness *in*

The world captive to the forces of death has its foundations shaken

The corpses of saints in their tombs are imbued with new life

The world is cracked open by the wooden stake of the cross driven into its heart

The sources of defilement are met face to face on the cross and there defeated

Holiness turns and goes on the attack, and uncleanness and its death-like pall must go on the retreat

All are released from the bondage of sin

Fear not the captive forces who keep us bound in death

Fear not the un-making powers which erode the earth

Fear not the fragility of bodies caught in the bonds of oppression

Fear not the spectre of death

For everything is being made holy

Death cannot hold the holy in its grip, but holiness and life and love and the divine breath of God are exploding out into the world

Everything is being made holy,

everything is being made holy,

everything is being made holy.

God will never, ever leave us.

God can never, ever leave us.

There is a new creation: and the Holy One of God in the midst of death is re-making this world as holy

And those in Ukraine whose corpses litter streets are holy
And the queer ones who pray to be different or be dead, they are holy
And the trans kids whose bodies have become objects of political rancour are holy
And black lives bound and imprisoned unjustly are holy
And refugees are holy as the years of their life eek out in indefinite detention
And the disabled bodies who are disregarded as invalid are holy

Until we see the corpses rise to life we must see the presence of the Holy working in those who beckon us to a more just world.

Holiness draws all things into the loving life of God: everything is set apart for God's purposes of love and mercy, peace and joy, justice and truth.

Hear these words from Anglican Trans* Poet Jay Hulme:

Holy! Holy! Holy!

If God is everywhere, then everywhere is holy,
everything is holy, *everyone* is holy.

The blaspheming tongue - holy.

The maze of streets - holy.

The broken street light that flickers at 2am
to welcome home the dying - it too, is holy.

The homeless are prophets and saints
as much as these bones and fragments.

Treat them with reverence and love them
for they are as holy as any other.

I am holy. You are holy.

The spit that flecks your lips as you curse out a stranger
is disgusting, but holy.

We are disgusting, but holy.

When we leave strangers to die
we are leaving the holy.

When we abandon the lost
we abandon the holy.

Take your neighbour in hand,
lead them to a crowded [ED],
see the doctors pull on their gloves;
the gloves are holy.

The hospital is holy.

The cracked linoleum and buzzing vending machine;

Holy! Holy! Holy!

To save a life, is holy.

All life is holy.

Lord, even death can be holy,
when a person is ready to go.

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... today we tell the story of the corpse of God, which does not defile, but is re-making the world to be holy, holy, holy. We tell the story of the fragile body of God whose holiness emanates out for the sake of the world, and against the forces of death.

Truly this is God's son
Truly this is God's law
Truly this is God's life for the world.
