

Isaiah 52:13-52:12; Psalm 22; Hebrews 10:16-25; John 18:1-19:42

Good Friday– Year A – April 14, 2017

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Good Friday has a dimension of suffering that most of us cannot fathom.

There is a section on suffering in the book *Darkness Yielding: Liturgies, Prayers and Reflections for Advent, Christmas, Holy Week and Easter*. It speaks to the suffering God we encounter on Good Friday—a God that Dietrich Bonhoeffer held onto as he was in the concentration camp from which he was taken to death. In his hour of need in a Nazi concentration camp, Bonhoeffer writes, “Only a suffering God can help.”

The book *Darkness Yielding* continues on with a reflection about suffering as follows. “God suffers because *God* loves, because God chooses to love, because *God* chooses not to reserve Himself the power to be, but to expend that power that an other may be, that a world may be, a beloved world. God has committed Himself to loving, and in so doing, as everyone knows who has ever loved, *God* exposed Himself to suffering, to being affected by joy or pain, by the response of the loved world. And this love, like all authentic love, is not destroyed by the negative and therefore painful response of that which is loved. This love, like all authentic love, is not destroyed when it is rebuffed. It is faithful love, and therefore indestructible and therefore to be trusted. The rebuffed, the strained, the struggling love of God is to be trusted, as the disciples discovered when, on Easter Day, the one in whom the suffering love of God was disclosed to them was found to be still

there, still just the same, indestructible and everlasting.”

The disciples discovered this kind of love and were committed as they more fully understood this indestructible love seeing the suffering of Jesus. Bonhoeffer expressed the nature of the disciples’ commitment in a poem he wrote in the atrocities of his own imprisonment in the concentration camp. His poem is entitled “Christians and Unbelievers.”

Men come to God when they are sore bestead,  
Pray to Him for succor, for his peace, for bread,  
For mercy for their sick, sinning, or dead –  
All men do so, Christian and unbelieving.

Christians come to God when *God* is sore bestead,  
Find *God* poor and scorned, without shelter or bread,  
Whelmed under weight of the wicked, the weak, the dead –  
Christians stand by God in *God’s* hour of grieving.<sup>1</sup>

Suffering is a part of life that is very difficult to understand—why it happens, what it must be. Questions we cannot answer. And yet on this Good Friday we stand by God in *God’s* hour of grieving, knowing and trusting in the

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<sup>1</sup> V. H. Vanstone in *Darkness Yielding: Liturgies, Prayers and Reflections for Advent, Christmas, Holy Week and Easter* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2001), 185-186.

indestructible and everlasting nature of God's love. Like those early disciples as we walk this journey with Jesus, we move a little more deeply into that place of love beyond understanding. We look and we listen for understanding and we find our way to being committed for all time just like those early disciples.