

All Saints' Day, Year B
November 1, 2015
The Rev. Barbara Hutchinson

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God, and the Word lived among us.

His stomach churns. His feet pace. He repeatedly wrings his hands to settle their shaking. Beads of perspiration anoint his forehead. His thoughts explode everywhere. He struggles to listen to any one person, for all he can hear is the tape, which plays and replays in his head.

He must do something dramatic. People aren't paying attention to him. People don't seem to care. Even his closest friends don't seem to understand him. They fret over the stupidest things, and when the big things, the things that really matter, are right in front of their eyes, blinders surface.

The days drag on. Whenever will it be the right time to depart?

The clouds hang heavily from the sky. The impending storm hovers upon the horizon. Sleep evades him. His only moments of peace are when he strolls in the coolness of the morning, as daylight breaks the darkness of night, as the first movements of morning pierce the night's stillness, and he is alert to the early stirrings of the wind. In those moments, in quiet conversation with God, hope rises again from within. A loneliness rattles around in his heart still, but he believes again, all will be well, in the end.

Surely he is right, there are times when the end does justify the means. He believes with his whole heart that this one act, which some will see as a shameful act of omission is necessary for others to see the truth clearly, for light to break into the darkness, and for his one mission to be accomplished.

As he heads back to group he imagines still huddled in the warmth of the tents, he thrusts his shoulders back, lifts his chest, and breathes more deeply, for a firmer resolve for working for the greater good has consumed his being.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word knows unrest in the soul.

The crowd around him is restless to move. In the wee hours of the morning, their bags are already slung upon their backs, their sleeping mats tucked beneath their arms, and their animals laden with supplies. They encounter and nearly accost him on the way, for surely this is the day they MUST depart.

Their anxiety escalates as they come to the edge of the town. Their eyes penetrate every darkened corner, searching out danger, for they are not expecting a warm

welcome. Their gut informs them they should have come sooner. Verbal abuse is slung their way. People challenge their leader, blaring accusations of neglect, thrusting innuendos of diminishing power, and uttering pleas of incomprehension that he showed up too late.

In the beginning was the Word and the Word feels their pain.

Sharp jabs of despair penetrate the air between them and the crowd, “Where were you when we needed you?” “If you had only been here, if you had only really loved us, if you had only been who you said you were, my heart right now would not be broken. The wails of lamentation pierce the air, women holding their babies rock back and forth, and the stares of disgust from the grown men cut through to his heart.

His own heart sinks. He strains to retrieve the memory of that moment when he knew for sure that the end justified the means, and certainty of knowing that the end they were experiencing in the moment isn’t going to be the end of it, after all. The bigger picture materializes in front of him, yet eludes the others. Oh how he wants to reconnect with that morning breeze on his face again, to feel the solidness of the rocks beneath him, to watch the sun emerging from the horizon during his quiet time with God, which convinced him a day ago that all would be well.

In the beginning was the Word and the Word weeps.

But something breaks open. All his plans, all his certainty, all his hope, collapse within him, and Jesus weeps.

Mary’s tears meet his eyes, pierce his heart, and unglue his soul. Her pain lures him into an awareness of his own unfathomable grief, and he can contain the grief no longer. The floodgates unlock and he dissolves into his own puddle of pain. His mind freezes, for at the moment, there is no mental room left to respond to their accusations. A fog of confusion blankets him.

In the beginning was the Word and the Word, helpless and weak, frail and human, beheld mankind’s enemy, and his heart shatters.

But then a different tape begins to play and replay: of an evening, not long ago, spent with his best friends, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Oh how he remembers his friend Lazarus. His larger-than-life laugh, which amuse them throughout the long evening hours as the sunlight faded, his generous smile, which welcomes him at heart and depth, and his sincere touch, which tells Jesus he is at home with them.

O Lazarus, O how he longs for that moment again, for a chance to receive his hospitality at his dinner table, perfectly set by Martha, to be buoyed by his laugh, to be held in his embrace, to be shown the truth of God. O God, why didn’t he prevent his death? Why did he have to sit and be still, and wait for death to claim his body?

In the beginning was the Word and the Word dwells within.

The mental tape jogs to a new frame, one where Mary, crouches before him, smothering oil upon his body, wiping his feet with her long brown tangled hair, anointing his body for a burial, soon to come. No words are spoken, nor needed in this interchange. In her lavish pouring out of love, sacred space is hallowed, made holy, within her soul, and she is changed forever. Grace and beauty and truth have found a home within her, where the presence of God resides.

In the beginning was the Word and the Word saves.

In that moment as Mary approaches him with tear laden eyes, and proclaims the truth, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Jesus knows her wailing and despair has broken open his heart to love and sacred space is hallowed within his soul, and he is forever changed.

He now has the courage to persist on the way to the cross in Jerusalem.

With one deep breath, Jesus understands his heart, the heart containing of all creation, is big enough to draw unto him all the suffering of the world, and to sanctify it, to hallow it, to make it holy, and to break it open for God's love.

He cries with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out" and in bringing Lazarus back to life, he seals his own death sentence. He brandishes a heavenly power, which alarms the Pharisees and solidifies their efforts at persecuting him, unto death.

The end does justify the means; Jesus allows Lazarus to die and resuscitates him, so Jesus may walk ever more decisively to the cross, so the power of death can finally be swallowed up by God's love.

In the beginning was the Word and the Word redeems.

Jesus, the Word, redeems each of us who have ever cried out from the depths of our soul, "Where were you when I needed you?"

Jesus, the Word, redeems each of us who feel consumed with pain, and fail to find God within it, but rather blame God for it.

Jesus, the Word, redeems each of us who have ever seen only our own dilemma, as the entirety of the world, and failed to see the larger picture of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus, the Word, redeems each of us who have ever protected our hearts from lavishly pouring out that precious gift God gave us to give away: love.

We must be willing to be broken open to love. It is what allows Jesus to save us.
Amen.