

Good Friday.

There was a time in my life when this day was honored as no other. It was a day of fasting and prayer. A day when the previous night's Maundy Thursday service, the washing of feet, the stripping of the altar, leaving the church in silence, continued to haunt my heart. A day when, rarely able to take the entire day off, I always carved out time to be at church and walk the stations of the cross with others.

That time seems so long ago.

This year, I'm sure there were some who found their way back to church but the COVID cloud continues to threaten a full return to such gatherings.

I found myself not in church but in the country, ending a much-needed week off with my Love and enjoying the spring weather. That evening we planned to be with the small group of people who had been our 'safe' zone for the past twelve months.

I should have been happy.

On the surface all was well, but my soul was filled with an incredible sense of sadness. One so overwhelming that for most of the day I stayed on the edge of tears, trying to fight off a persistent foreboding filled with dread and defeat, hoping no one would notice.

It was after all, Good Friday.

Every day of Holy Week, my friend, Margie and I had shared our thoughts and feelings, wondering as we often do about what was happening to the disciples during that week over 2,000 years ago. Today was no different. We imagined how they might have responded to the events of that day. Our thoughts, as always, centered on the Magdalene and her relationship with Jesus and the role she was about to play. Throughout the day, we texted. Our words were almost like the call and responses of worship. One questioned, the other answered, one posited, the other considered.

I was stunned by the contrast of my day, my feet firmly planted in two worlds, one spiritual and one secular. I remained helplessly suspended in a surreal state, hovering between internal contemplation and external busyness.

Was it the same on that first Good Friday?

Had the crowds, now satisfied by seeing the dark circus of death, dispersed to their evening activities? Were they sharing stories of the day? Were the Gentiles bragging at seeing another triumphant example of Roman superiority and justice? For the Jews, it marked the beginning of Sabbath. Were the chief priests and elders, smug in their success of delivering Jesus to Pilate, congratulating each other? Proud that they had eliminated yet another so-called Messiah. All silently relieved that the day was over, knowing this pretender was more dangerous than the others.

How many, Gentile or Jew, were among the ones who cried out: "He deserves to die! Crucify him!"

Did any dare to question why the afternoon had become dark as the night or admit to being afraid when the ground shook beneath them? A coincidence they must have reassured each other. No human, especially not this remainder of a man hanging from the cross, striped for all to see the bruises covering his body, could merit such a powerful response from the heavens.

The small band of his disciples had disappeared long before the afternoon, their leader denying knowing the man now dying on the cross, not once but three times. All were in hiding, fearing for their lives.

Only the women attended to his death. They boldly stood at the bottom of the cross, steeled by their love for him, awaiting his final breath, ready to care for the body.

Even so, male or female they were all his disciples, they had all known him, walked with him, learned how to pray from him, witnessed his miracles.

For those hiding and those standing in full view, this evening would hold no reverie. For them, the void of life ahead without this man, their teacher, must have been unbearable. Their grief overshadowed only by their sense of aloneness.

The sadness engulfs me. I can no longer stand to be with my thoughts. I reach out again to my friend.

‘It seems like anyone who keeps up with Christianity would feel the sadness of this week, especially of this day.’ Margie reasoned in a text, then suggests: “Go to your little sacred space outside and weep. Maybe it will help.”

And so, I did.

I walked the winding trails that climb to the highest part of our land. I enter through a tiny opening to the place that hides my little sacred spot. A place tucked deep in the woods, remote and wild, land untouched by mankind. A place where slivers of sunshine chase the darkness away and where only the sound of the wind, traveling through branches, can be heard.

Later I will return to the world, to sharing dinner and conversation with friends and loved ones. We’ll talk of events and mundane things. We’ll laugh and cajole each other. No one will speak of this day of days.

Later.

But for now, I will sit alone, and I will weep.

Dorothy Gibbons 2021