

Marquand Chapel  
April 11, 2006

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Holy Tuesday

We've been walking the Stations on Wednesdays lately, the ones you see in the windows around us. The first time, I was utterly and completely moved – shaken. These were people who, one way or another, had wound up without a home. They were, for me, a reminder that suffering did not end with the Cross. These Stations changed me, that first day.

We walked the Stations the next Wednesday. By this point, I had been with these images for several days. Walking the Stations this next time had a different impact; I was annoyed. “We'd walked these Stations already,” I thought, “why do we need to do it again.” I mean, it wasn't even Good Friday! So I gave the chapel a perfunctory stroll, just trying to fit in, I guess. I didn't bother with the final few stations – I just found my seat once I reached the piano.

I had grown accustomed to these Stations of the Cross. I had grown accustomed to them, and I turned away.

If you're like me, you hate watching the local news. There's something really disturbing about the format, and I don't want to hear the bad news they deliver. The news anchor would say something like,

- “a man was arrested in connection with a quadruple homicide today. And in other news”
- “a teen allegedly fired a gun on a school bus.”
- “authorities say that 4 people were found dead in a Virginia home.”
- “a District police officer shot a 43-year old man in the leg after he attacked her with a wooden club. And in other news”
- “This just in: a junior at the college of William & Mary died early yesterday after he climbed onto a steep, dew-covered roof and fell 4 stories. More on this at 5.”

These were Sunday's headlines on NBC4.

This summer, I went through the instrument of torture commonly referred to as Clinical Pastoral Education. I worked at the trauma center for the Murder Capital of the World.

CPE in many, many ways felt like bad segments of the local news. As chaplains, we were charged with tending to the spiritual care of patients, their families, and staff. This could have a wide reach, walking families through exciting moments like the birth of a healthy baby, or the great news that a once-dysfunctional heart was gonna be working just fine. Most of the time, however, the journeys we took with patients, families and staff were through crisis.

Any one of the day's headlines would come to our doors, and, in fact, they did. Sometimes my mom would call me from home to tell me about survivors of some major accident who were headed to our hospital, something she'd learn about on the news.

And at first, this was hard. It was very, very hard. And then, one day, I noticed that I was no longer rattled by the sight of a stab-wound or a bullet entry point. Whereas, in my earlier days at the hospital, I was devastated to see teenagers and young adults who'd been caught in the crossfires of the violent neighborhoods in which they lived. In my later days at the hospital, I found myself numb. Gunshots and stab wounds were pretty routine. No big deal.

Suffering along with the suffering was too hard, so I stopped.

I had grown accustomed to violence and the suffering that went with it. I had grown accustomed to it, and I turned away.

David Michalek, the artist who brought us these Stations, came to talk to us last Friday. And he told us about the project around this work of art. And we learned that the people who are shown here had been homeless, but were part of a program at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine called The Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness and Housing. This program is designed to support formerly homeless people as they work to reclaim their lives. And the Stations grew out of this group – David Michalek didn't prescribe an idea for the project. Rather, over the course of several months, the group discussed all kinds of ways to express the spirituality of their experiences through the art they would come to create, together.

It was the very people you see in these lightboxes who thought that they might have something to tell us about what it feels like to travel the Via Dolorosa. It was these very people who said, "we know something about suffering that you might need to know, so look at us, and do not turn away."

Mary Alex and David took us on the journey that leads up to the Stations, the journey that is outlined in Mark. And I thought it would be helpful to take the time on Holy Tuesday, a day that sits quietly between the leaves laid in Jesus' path as he entered Jerusalem, two days before, and the day of the Last Supper, two days ahead. No, most people (to the extent that they discuss Holy Week at all) don't really talk much about Holy Tuesday. The lectionary texts aren't the most exciting in the buildup to the Passion, you heard the reading from Mark, where the Chief Priests, the scribes and the elders challenged Jesus' authority. But we heard the Gospel today, with that litany as a preface to see this day in context. To see this day in the path of Jesus' journey to the Cross.

"By what authority do you do these things," they asked?

"Which things?"

And let's think about that for just a moment. Our litany reminded us of Jesus' journey, from the River Jordan through towns and the countryside, along the sea. And that journey involved times of teaching, of calling others to discipleship. And that journey involved an abundance of love and compassion for the most unexpected people in the most unexpected places.

Jesus encountered the suffering, and he taught them, and he gave them new life. The miracles, in themselves, yes, are extraordinary. But the real miracle, in my eyes, is not that Jesus healed so many, but that he actually cared enough to heal them in the first place. And as we see how Jesus' care extends farther and farther into the reaches of the earth, as we see how many people he just did not turn away, as we see precisely how extensive and how radical Jesus' ministry was to the world, we also see just how some might want to challenge him.

Jesus encountered the suffering, and loved them. And (come with me now), what we see is that:

- When the people with unclean spirits came, Jesus did not turn away.
- When the sick laid in bed with fever, Jesus didn't turn away.
- When the lepers,
- the Paralytic
- the man with a withered hand
- When Jairus begged for his daughter's life,
- When 5000 or 4000 hungry people gathered by the seaside,
- When the sick came just to touch his cloak,
- When the Syrophenician woman begged for her daughter to be healed,
- When the blind sought for sight,
- When people brought little children to feel that healing touch,
- When thousands upon thousands gather in the streets this week, chanting, "si se puede, si se puede," asking only that this country acknowledge their journey and bring them out of the shadows, Jesus doesn't turn away.
- And when YOU come to Jesus, Jesus does not turn away.

They asked: by what authority did Jesus do all these things?

By what authority? By the authority of the One, true, and loving God who was working to make all things new. This is the One, true and loving God who works in you, and me, and all of God's creation to make all things new.

Jesus' journey was full of times when any of us would have turned away.

And so I ask you this: what have you grown accustomed to? Whose experiences are so hard that you can't think about them any more, that their suffering is too hard to bear, that their experience is beyond anything you can handle, that their pain is so great that you have to turn away?

This happens to all of us, let me be the first to admit.

But it didn't happen to Jesus.

Friends, we are called to witness to the life of Christ, and to walk in the steps of Jesus. In this time of preparation, as Lent comes to a close, let's take a look at what we've turned away from.

And then, let's turn back.

But this time, through the grace of God, let's look through the eyes of Jesus.

Let's look anew, and let's remember that we're not looking alone.  
Si se puede. (Yes, we can.)

Because don't forget. When we turn away from the suffering of those who walk the earth with us, we turn away from the suffering that our God endured //so that we might all be saved.

We learned, gratefully, that many of the project participants in the Stations are employed, living in homes with the reclaimed lives the spiritual journey of this project played a role in.

But some haven't quite been so fortunate. Some of the people photographed have since died. A few have been missing for over a year. Vanished.

Let's not forget them. Let's not turn away. Let's not stop praying for them and for all that they symbolize.

Children of God – Behold the face of Jesus.  
Amen.