Into Your Hands

Good Friday, La Merced 2019

Antigua, Guatemala

The streets of Antigua are empty. No crowds stand silently, reverently, in the darkness waiting for Jesus to emerge from La Merced at dawn. Jesus, carrying his cross, hundreds of the faithful carrying Jesus. No pause, an acknowledgement of the offering, before the procession moves across the carefully laid ‘carpets’ that adorn the cobblestone streets. No candles held or tears shed as they quietly sing, “Lord, forgive us, forgive me, for your wounds,” as he slowly passes by. No burning incense or music of lament. No entering into the story in relief as they have done for generations, for centuries. No opportunity for us to witness his passion coming to life as never before, because we are witnessing it through their eyes. The streets of Antigua are empty.

This Good Friday is unlike any they have known before. Yet I know Good Friday shall come to them and through them still. For I have seen it their eyes. I have walked beside them as they slowly journey beside him. As they gently reach their hand up to touch his cloak with hearts full and breaking. As the tears slip down their cheeks as they kneel. So, I know that while the streets of Antigua are empty, they shall journey beside him still.

Today, they shall weep as he is condemned. They shall collapse as he stumbles under the burden of the cross. They shall shed tears as the mallet falls again and again, and he is nailed to the tree. And they shall whisper his words, “Into your hands, I commend my spirit.” The streets are empty, but
their and his words shall intermingle and echo there still.

Because for them, Good Friday is not a day in the liturgical calendar. Good Friday holds their lives. For he suffers with them each day, and they know it, trust it. And each day, they echo his words, “Into your hands, I commend my spirit, Lord.” “Before this illness, this fear, this loss, into your hands, Lord. My child’s life, my own, to you, Lord. To you, I commend my all.” They offer him their pain and allow him to carry it, carry them, throughout the year. Good Friday, in contrast, is the day they, in gratitude, carry him, weep for him. So, today, it does not matter whether they are in the streets or in their homes. They shall carry him. They shall weep for him. In gratitude and in love.

Patzún, Guatemala

This week, this Holy Week, Guatemala’s first community COVID case was identified and it was discovered in Patzún. Some of you may recall that Faith In Practice has a close relationship with this little indigenous town nestled in the Highlands. Patzún, which is home to Hospitalito Corpus Cristi, a tiny hospital and home for children, and the Franciscan sisters there. In order to contain the spread of COVID, the government has sequestered the entire town. It is now barricaded with sandbags. It is being monitored by the army. This little town that we love.

The streets of Patzún, too, are now empty. Empty, but filled with voice and music. Praises and prayers to their God over speakers resound. The people of Patzún are raising their voices as one and praying, “Into your hands, Lord, we commend our spirits to you. With trust. With joy. To you.” A transcendent strength that resides in weakness as they seek to follow the One in whose weakness true strength is found. The One who this day is journeying to his cross yet once again. Showing us yet again in his weakness, true strength.

This Good Friday

This Good Friday is unlike any we have ever known. The churches are shuttered. The streets are empty. And, yet in this Good Friday, we are being given a gift. An invitation to live into Good Friday as they do. An invitation offered to us to journey beside him in our weakness as they do. To offer to him our weakness and pain in acknowledgement of his. To meet him there.

Recently, I wrote that I knew our Guatemalan brothers and sisters would guide us in the days ahead. My hope was that they might lead us in our frailty toward transcendent strength. And so they have.

So, today, may we weep and pray with them as together we journey beside him to the cross. And may we raise our voices with our brothers and sisters of Guatemala, those in Antigua, Patzún, and across all of Guatemala, in song and in prayer. May we join our voices and pray, “Into your hands, I commend my spirit, Lord.” In gratitude. With trust. With joy. And, with transcendent hope as we await his Easter’s dawning. Easter’s dawning brighter, stronger, because we have offered our weakness humbly alongside theirs.

May each of you sense his presence more deeply, more fully, than ever before during these most holy days. And know we are praying for you. Each and every day.

Rev. Linda L. McCarty
President & CEO
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