

Reflection— Rev. Karen Oehl

Close to You

And everyone who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance observing these things. Luke 23:49



I have the practice of listening to *Jesus Christ, Superstar* around Holy Week and Easter. The songs evoke so well the emotions of the people around Jesus, and Jesus himself, in the events of the Passion. I find myself humming/singing some of the songs, especially the song of Mary Magdalene, *I Don't Know How to Love Him*. You can hear her longing to be closer to Jesus and yet she does not understand him. For some reason this year I have also had the Carpenters' song "*Close to You*" in mind. "Just like me, they long to be, close to you. . ."

This is just one of the many ways in this Holy Week that I try to draw closer to Jesus. Music, reading the Gospel accounts, worship services, prayer and contemplation are all involved. Easter to me is flat and worldly without going deeper into the events of Jesus' last days.

That means particularly dwelling on the suffering Christ. Great works of art depict the humiliation, torture, and crucifixion of Christ. That is one way to draw nearer to the suffering Christ. We can also look to other places where there is suffering, understanding that in the suffering of humanity, whom God loves, Jesus also suffers. This is even harder, I think, than imagining an execution that happened 2,000 years ago. It is heartbreaking to consider what is going on right now and is so very real. We do not need to look farther than the war in Ukraine, a mass shooter on the subway, hunger, homelessness and hopelessness in our own community.

When the Apostle Paul speaks of resurrection--and we will be reading some of his words this Sunday—he most often combines that good news with reminders of present suffering. Paul experiences suffering as a way to draw closer to Jesus, to share fully in the experience of Jesus that heightens the future joy of resurrection. Paul, practical Paul, is also a mystic in this sense. An important part of his teaching that makes sense to me is not to rush on to the resurrection without paying attention to how we live in the present. Or maybe not rush on to Easter Sunday without fully experiencing Good Friday.

As Jesus of the Judgment in Matthew 25 reminds us, when we see someone sick, or in prison, or naked, hungry, thirsty, an unwelcomed stranger, we see Jesus. He is close to us.

Jesus, may I not only stand at a distance, but draw closer to you through sharing in the suffering of other human beings. Amen.