

Friday in Easter Week
April 2, 2010

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Anise began to tell me all sorts of stories, funny and awful, some of them of her uncle and their relationship, you know like most family relationship was full of complications and full of complicated love. The stories just kind of tumbled out of her, I didn't need to say anything. She needed to talk -- she talked and she talked and she started to laugh and she laughed and she laughed, and then she started to cry, she began to weep. When we arrived at the care facility and we went to her uncle's room, where just a few days early earlier Anise's family and I held hands and prayed for uncle and now we stood, just the two of us right at the foot of her uncle's bed -- just the two of us and his body. Which had not been made nice -- you know for burial -- was just lying there -- dead. He had become a dead body. I'd been around corpses before, you know in C.P.E. and some other training I'd had, but here we were on Good Friday, of all days, in the presence of death, nothing special, nothing dramatic, nothing unusual about this death -- just the dead body of an old man. I came away trying to find some kind of amazing significance -- you know some kind of epiphany in this surreal Good Friday experience, but there wasn't one -- there wasn't one -- and that might be the awful mundane truth of this day, that death really is the great equalizer and there is nothing particularly special about it. That is what makes us human; we die; the life goes out of us. We give up our spirit; in the twinkling of an eye we go from living people to a strange heap of molecules and dust. Even the horrible, torturous, dramatic death of Jesus on the cross as awful and horrendous as scandalous as that death is; in the end when the body comes down off the cross and is laid in the arms of Jesus' Mother, he is just another body, a meaningless tick in the history books, one of the hundreds of thousands of people who were crucified by the Romans during this period in which they made it their favorite blood sport. And it was awful; crucifixion was a particularly cruel way to die, particularly because it was all about torture and humiliation. But when it's over; when Jesus gives up his spirit, when he breathes his last, when the life goes out of him, then he's just another body; he's laid in the arms of his mother; the disciples gather around, those who haven't hid themselves out of fear, which is where

most of the men, have gone, but the women are there – his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary of Magdala. His Mother and this community of support that surrounds her as she cradles her dead son, the little boy that she sang to sleep, the baby that she laid in the manger, the baby full of such promise, the brilliant child, the precocious little boy, whom she did not understand. She cradles his dead body and this is what he’s reduced to. This is who God is; a body -- lifeless and ordinary already beginning to decay. I can only imagine that Mary must have searched for some kind of significance, some kind of message, some kind answer. Why did this happen? What does it mean? And there’s no answer; there are no words. This is what the incarnation truly looks like – that the word made flesh has been become dead flesh and in the face of this unbearable grief, there are no words. Those of you who’ve have experienced this kind of grief know this to be true. There are no words – there are no words. On this day maybe more vividly than any other day in the Christian year we are reminded that Christianity is not about a theological system; it’s not about a particular ethic; it’s not about behaving well; it’s not about loving your neighbor; it’s not about having your sin taken away; it’s about a man, this man – this man who is God in human body; it’s about this man being tortured and dying. Ken Leech reminded us last night that Christianity is in many ways a religion of defeat, which is to say it’s about a journey – you know we keep walking and at the end of that journey we see today those feet have gaping wounds in them, they’re marked by torture, by violence, by the worst that human beings are capable of and in order for the resurrection to have any meaning we have to be able to come close to touch as it were exactly what it is that’s being resurrected – not a spirit, not an idea, not a theological concept acted out as if on stage – nothing pious or churchy or theological; it’s a body, a dead body, a mound of flesh, a corpse, which is to say part of the earth, part of us, part of who we are – all dead bodies are alike in the end. We look for significance, for meaning and death is wide-mouthed and silent. And in his death Jesus becomes just like us, which is to say that he becomes another dead body. In a world that has seen the piles of corpses at Auschwitz and Buchenwald, a world that is littered with dead bodies to the point of meaninglessness, right? We know all too well the awful unanimity of death, but it is the anonymous body, the meaningless tick in the history books -- that particular corpse – that’s the body that is resurrected on Easter Day. That’s how God comes to us; that’s how God comes close to us in pain and suffering in a body, in our bodies, in hands and feet that are marked with scars. The resurrected body retains those marks, right? The scars are still there. The body that was tortured is the body that is raised. Jesus

shows us exactly what it means to be human beings. It means that there are marks on our hands, marks on our feet. We are scared by violence, in brief. And finally we are silenced in death. We become just another body. That's what it means to be human and that's exactly where God needs us, where God finds us at the foot of the cross looking up into the silent face of death and realizing that that is the face of God. The body that is utterly defeated, poured out; the word that is silenced. That is the body that God raises up to new life.