

***Maundy Thursday Liturgy***

***Lydia Talbot***

***April 5, 2007***

**Tonight on this dark and sobering leg of our Lenten journey, we are suffering untold crosses...losses...personal and global pain...There is illness...the steel news of cancer and chemo...our own moral bankruptcy and private and public sin. There are so many tears. How can we trust the journey? Our own precious Eloise Chevrier lies in the Washington Hospital since two heart attacks Sunday and nearly a month of life-threatening illness; Colleen Henry's lumpectomy this week revealed cancer of the lymph nodes; George Talbot, Earl's brother, is living with cancer and the sudden suicide death of his life partner Steve; My niece, Susie, called this morning struggling to keep on after the death of her 21 year old daughter Kelsey; there are loved ones in each one of your lives who need our prayers; and you yourself may be enduring deep and intense pain that lies hidden in cardiac hollows.**

**For Christians who take their faith seriously, the Lenten journey is the toughest time on the calendar. As we stand in solidarity with Christ's suffering, we are reminded that almost every inch of the earth's surface is soaked with the tears and blood of the innocent, and we weep. For Jesus, his suffering was the most inhumane form of capital punishment, execution by crucifixion.**

**Consider the scandal of Good Friday as a headline report on the nightly news, inspired by theologian Robert McAfee Brown.**

**Leading the news this Friday evening...**

**The insurgency movement led by a young Galilean peasant came to an end today after a weeklong uprising that began last Sunday.**

**Jesus of Nazareth was executed on a dump**

heap outside the city wall. It has been a week full of intrigue, as authorities tried to contain a movement that increasingly threatened them as the week went on. Each day the leader of the insurgents challenged both religious and political establishments in a series of explosive encounters. On Monday, temple police were summoned when Jesus angrily upset tables on moneychangers and went after them with a whip, claiming they had “turned a house of prayer into a den of robbers.”

All week there have been brisk encounters and heckling in the streets. Jesus allegedly challenged the authority of Caesar by urging people not to give Caesar what should only be given to God. By Wednesday evening, it appeared authorities were plotting to kill him. After his group had celebrated the Passover meal on Thursday evening, they went to the Mount of Olives, where soldiers were already waiting to arrest Jesus. Unconfirmed reports claim that one of his members named Judas defected with intelligence that made the arrest almost routine.

By sun-up, it was determined that Jesus was a threat to Caesar. He was beaten with billy clubs by local police, bound and brought before Pontius Pilate, who disposed of the matter by washing his hands and allowing a raging mob to sentence Jesus to death. Soldiers stripped him naked, draped a scarlet robe around him, then set a crown of thorns on his head. They thrust a staff in his right hand, knelt in front of him, mocked him, spat upon him, bludgeoned him repeatedly on the head with the staff, and forced him to carry his own stake to be crucified with two criminals. Deserted by all but one of his followers, he was nailed to the cross with spikes driven through his hands and feet. Reliable witnesses observed a sudden darkness for three hours and a turbulent earthquake

**that struck when Jesus died at the Place of the Skull. His followers have temporarily gone into hiding.**

**Now, these reports just in from three experts with differing views of the events...**

**The head of Roman security forces maintains they could not apprehend Jesus publicly without incurring negative approval. Some of their smartest operatives asked him sophisticated questions in front of large crowds, but after the blasphemy of suggesting that his God was greater than Caesar, they infiltrated his group and performed a clean and efficient operation without resistance. The official says Jerusalem will be a safer place without Jesus.**

**One organizer for the homeless in Jerusalem reports a different assessment of Jesus.**

**She says his message gave the common people great hope; he was preaching “good news to the poor and liberty to the captives.” He was not an “expert on the problems of poor people”; he was poor himself. By his own admission, he had “nowhere to lay his head.” The homeless had hoped that he would be the one to save them.**

**Describing some of the teachings of Jesus, one of his followers named Bartholomew says that it all comes down to the need to love one another. It is not easy to do, but he says Jesus promised that if we keep on trying, God will give us the power to do a better job. Jesus wanted people to work together instead of competing against each other. That means sharing our goods, freeing prisoners, and canceling our debts. He really believed that everybody could change – rich, poor, men, women, children, elderly, straight, gay, black, brown, yellow, white – all**

**could be part of a new sort of family. When he first looked up at Jesus' corpse on the cross, Bartholomew says he was disheartened, but still has hope Jesus' program will not fail. First, he refers to the rest of his group. They may be in hiding now, but soon will emerge again. Second, Jesus said that if he died, God would raise him from the dead, not just in the hearts of his people, but maybe in some other ways as well. He also suggested that whatever happens, Jesus' story will not have ended in those final agonizing hours of endurance, when a suffering Jesus, stretched out on the cross in excruciating pain, uttered his last words.**

**Prayer of Confession:**

**O God, we confess we are mired in mourning what we do not have, instead of celebrating what we do have. We place Christ on the cross every time our preoccupation with self-interest and greed subjects others to pain and violence. As we walk this dark journey tonight, we pray that You will stop us in our tracks, shake us up, and show us how to risk our death in loyalty to the resurrected Christ, as disciples for Your Easter message of hope, and healing, and new life for all God's children. Amen.**

**Assurance:**

As Elaine, Jackie, Earl and I surrounded Eloise this week in the Washington Hospital, she lay unable to move after two near death heart attacks Sunday. Now, tubes and machines sustain her precious life and heart that has poured out immeasurable transforming love to us all. And yet, her eyes twinkle, her great dimpled smile is radiant, and she even sings along the familiar camp and ukulele songs. Eloise is all about Easter hope and joy in the midst of her Maundy Thursday struggle.

This morning Colleen Henry from St. Paul's Church, who started out here at Wellington with Tom some 30 years ago, wrote this e-mail. "The good news is they got the whole tumor. The bad news is there is more cancer, so I will have to

have my lymph nodes removed next week. Please keep all those with cancer and other chronic diseases in your prayers as they travel through the difficult Lent-like times into knowing the joy of Easter. May we all be able to affirm come Sunday 'tis the spring of souls today.'

And so let us remember that it is hope that is always still there, even when our worst fears have been realized.

[Remain standing at the microphone while the Vermeer plays "The Earthquake".]