

This evening as we have heard the passion of Christ again from John's perspective, I have pondered the question: why do we need Good Friday? I'm guessing that everyone of us has heard this story before, has sat through this Good Friday evening, we know where this story leads. We know that Easter is coming, that death is not final.

Why mark today as so special when we know the end of the story is new life?

I'm reminded of a question that came up in a grief group I was part of for hospice, where people met even years after their spouse's had died. And we sometimes asked, is meeting with this notion of grief simply our wallowing in it? Does it keep us from moving on? Does coming before the cross tonight simply perpetuate some self-satisfying self-pity or grief?

So this may seem totally tangential but I promise you its not... but I love cats. Cats have been part of my life since I was little, and some of you may know of my sweet baby boy Bon. Short of course for Dietrich Bonhoeffer. I've got a picture of him in my office right next to my desk and he has been my best friend for the past 13 years. I love that cat deeply. It's the same love I've held too for cats all my life, but particularly for an orange kitten named sunshine. Without protracting the story, it will suffice to say that while I loved this kitten it was hit one day by a car. My first memory of death. I remember placing Sunshine in a shoebox before burying him. And I've held that cat in my heart ever since.

I've found a place for the love I had for Sunshine. It's there with Bon. But I still have that hurt from that day he died. I have a new life to celebrate linked to the old... but that painful loss in his death still happened.

I see sunshine in that cross on which Jesus died. Something good and wonderful that I said goodbye to and something which has in many was transformed into the joy I hold for Bon. But that good things still left me, despite coming back in a way. And it still does hurt.

We all lose. We have good things, good people, who we say goodbye to and it hurts, even though love is still there, both from ourselves for what was lost and I believe that love remains that comes from those things we've said goodbye to.

New life always comes. And it may very well help us to place in perspective, heal, and celebrate in the midst of our hurts of loss. But those hurts have still happened. And the scars remain.

I see Sunshine at the cross. I see hospice patients who were friends and who have died. I see good summers off from school, former romances, good friends I haven't spoken to in years. All sorts of good that is in the past, despite such things transforming into new experiences.

What do you see in that cross? What people who have loved? What part of yourself that is no longer is there that hurts to know is in the days gone by?

The death of Christ happened and it hurt. And we will celebrate new life, joy triumphs, love defeats hate. Yet we tonight is a way that we hold the stories of pain past.

Look unabashed at the cross. Light a candle for what you see. Look to the resurrection when you need to, its coming! But if you carry something like I carry Sunshine, something that may be as old as when you weren't even a teenager? That thing? That's why we remember Good Friday and the death of Jesus as we prepare for the resurrection. Bring all that you carry. It is not only welcome at the cross, but it hangs there too with Christ.

Amen.