

## Good Friday. April 19, 2019.

The film version of one of my favorite novels opens in a close-up of a typewriter as the narrator types, "This is a record of hate." The film and novel, "The End of the Affair," is the story of the sometimes dark, sometimes creepily obsessive affair between Sarah, who is married to a dull civil servant, and Bendrix, a misanthropic writer, during the London Blitz in World War 2. Bendrix, the male half of the couple, is the narrator and wants us to focus on how the affair ends. He wants to convince us that it has ended in hatred: of Sarah, of himself, of Sarah's husband, and finally of God. He wants to convince us that the story he is telling us is a "record of hate" all the way through.

But he can't quite be convincing. There *is* something disordered in all the human loves in the film, for sure, but the story is a love story. Despite all his protestations, despite several painful events I won't spoil for you, despite even his feelings, it is a story about love. First, the confused and yes sullied love that pulses through their affair and afterwards, and then finally about the love of God--from and to confused and sullied people. This "record of hate" is clearly a love story, even if not a very happy one.

The Passion story we read tonight is an awful story. People torture an innocent man. His friends, or at least the vast majority of his male friends, abandon him. Government and religious authorities put their power to misuse for the entirely ignoble purpose of preserving that very power. There is abundant sin in the story. It is always sinful to murder, even if the murder is state-sanctioned and perfectly legal, as Jesus' was. It is always sinful to be complicit in murders and injustice, whether it's through cowardice or just world-weary somnolence--whether we are Peter or his companions at the charcoal fire. It is sinful to hurt an innocent, as Pilate does, because we lack the imagination to get out of a tiresome and dangerous situation. It is sinful to betray, to deny, to hide, to be silent while others are led off to death. This story is full of sin and hatred--sin that, on an honest night, we can see easily enough in ourselves. But it isn't a story *about* sin and hatred.

This is a story about love. This is a story about a divine love that will go all the way down into the deepest pits to find us. Good Friday is not a story *about* human sin or how it gets paid for. It is a story about a God who went to the abyss of human existence because all too often that is where we can be found. It is about a God who still comes to find us in the deepest graves we can fall into. When we pass through the valley of the shadow of death—and we do—Jesus is already there with us because he preceded us there.

We find our way into all kinds of graves, sometimes because we've gotten lost, sometimes because someone has pushed us into them, sometimes just through sheer bad luck. We blunder our way into a divorce; we get oppressed by enemies; we hear a fatal diagnosis for ourselves or, even worse, for someone we love. Whatever our dark night of the soul and however we got there, God can find us there because God has been there.

And behind all the ugliness and hatred and sin of the Passion, that is the story we are telling tonight. The story of a God who loves us enough to suffer and who is always with us when we suffer. This is what it means for our suffering to be hallowed—it is not that God wills or causes our suffering; it is that God is there with us in our suffering, and what God touches is made holy.

Tonight we *should* examine our conscience. We *should* be cut to the quick by the ways we recognize ourselves in those surrounding Jesus in his Passion. We should grieve—this is what we did to the brightest hope ever to come to earth and if he came again in the same way, we would do it again. But, we have gone astray if we forget that in the story of Jesus, guilt and grief are overcome by love. We have missed the point if we think, like Bendrix, that the hatred in this story means that this is a story about hate. There is hope even here, because God is here. There is hope even in our deepest grave, because God has been and is there. Good Friday, like every story about the God of Jesus Christ, is a story about love. Amen.