

At-one-ment - Sermon Based on Matthew chapters 26 & 27
by David Hindman on Sunday, April 17, 2011

It's a Sunday. I'm with students on a mission trip to Mexico. We're at the local Catholic Church when I see her: a woman standing and looking up at the life-size battered body of Jesus on the cross. She's tiny, her body made small by poverty and malnutrition and hard work. She's lost in thought gazing up into the face of the dead Jesus. And shyly she reaches up a hand to caress the foot of Jesus and then bends her head in prayer. That Mexican peasant taught me more that day about the atonement and the meaning of Jesus' death than all my years of study.

I don't know for sure what was happening between Jesus and her, but they were at one with each other. She looked up at Jesus and saw a God who also knew first hand the unbearable suffering pain the world can load on us. This God in Jesus' human form could see her soul and also know what it is to be alone and forgotten. As she put out a caressing hand she knew she was not alone in her life's hardship. If anyone knew the troubles she'd seen, surely it's Jesus. And they were at one with each other as she reached up tenderly to touch the foot of that dead Jesus, to comfort him in his godforsaken agony. Like those women at the cross long ago, she stood at the foot of this cross to be with Jesus so he would not be alone.

What's Jesus death mean for us? How is it a way for us to experience atonement, at-one-ment? In Jesus we meet a God who knows our anguish and grief and suffering and loss. At the heart of the universe is a God who knows right well what it is to be abandoned and forsaken. So when we feel alone or forgotten with joy blotted out by the dark, God comes to stay with us, nearer than life itself, thanks be to God. And when we reach out a hand to comfort or help those who suffer, it's Jesus we serve. We stand with the tortured and worn down against the ruling powers of poverty or injustice or disease or ignorance – we are at one with Jesus living in them. We comfort them and touch the broken heart of Jesus, and find ourselves healed along the way, thanks be to God. Here are holy week's gifts - Christ is at one with us bringing healing to what needs mending. And as we serve the battered in our midst we are at one with him who was broken to make us whole. When we gather at the Lord's Table to share his broken body and shed blood we pray, "Make us one with Christ, one with each other and one in ministry to all the world." May that prayer truly be answered in us and let us say, Amen.