

*Based on Mark 15:24, And they crucified him.*

*Also based on "A People's Historian" by Kenneth Carroll*

If we want to recover, we have to tell the truth. A terrible story has to be told.

This is the premise for any form of healing. From addiction, from abuse, from violence, from historical harm. First, we have to admit we have a problem.

This is what we have been trying to do through the season of Lent, with our SPC History Project in Adult Education and its themes woven throughout worship.

We began the Season of Lent with a call to surrender our ego to the testing and tending of spirits in the wilderness. We continued with a call to name and claim those who have come before, as we worship the One who has named and claimed us. We have sought to heal generational trauma for ourselves and for generations to come. Just last week we sang through the troubling in our soul toward a spirit of healing grace.

Throughout the season, we have gleaned insight into the role of this congregation in Shepherdstown and the larger church in the 1800s, up to and including the Civil War. We have wrestled with the legacy of the Colonization Society and the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America. We have told the terrible truth of slave-holding in this congregation and the broader community. We have spoken the names of SPC members we believe to have been enslaved, and we have pointed the finger at those who worked hard to keep them so, and were willing - even eager - to document their efforts.

If the cross bears witness to anything, it is unjust suffering at the hands of religious tyranny. Slavery at SPC is most certainly a sign of that cross. When it comes to our history, we are the ones who betray Jesus. We are the chief priests and scribes, the Roman soldiers and Pontius Pilate.

This history is a terrible truth. And we have told what we know of it.

But that is only part of the story.

The People's Story, as our poet puts it, remains elusive but not entirely erased. By that I mean the history, from their own perspective, of those who were enslaved and those who aligned with their struggle. It is an untold history of *moments of resistance* we may never know for sure but must absolutely imagine *sung in small circles, furtive meetings, underground and under siege*. If the cross bears witness to anything, it is the story of an entire underground movement of support for the ones who suffer unjustly, even if that underground movement is unable to stop the source of that suffering.

The People's History from the SPC balcony, through the side door, if the sign of the cross is any indication, must also include one Simon of Cyrene after another helping the ones who suffer unjustly carry the cross. The People's History, if the sign of the cross is any indication, includes an underground network of supporters

mixing wine with myrrh that the soldiers cannot see because it is not their job to give it. The People's History, if the sign of the cross is any indication, *alters the course of a raging river of oppression, turning love for each other into a garrison of righteous rebellion.*

That history is part of our SPC heritage, too.

The People's History may not be memorialized in official minutes of the Session, but those who made that history still *walk among us, willing to tell the truth* through the biblical story, if we have ears to hear and eyes to see and hearts to respond. Jesus, it turns out, and all who suffer unjustly with him, is not really alone.

It may even be possible, if the cross bears witness to anything, that a Joseph of Arimathea or two - respected members of the council among the White congregation - do what they can in the midst of literal war to show that they care.

And most certainly there are those in the People's History of SPC who, like the women, bear witness from afar, who do not run away, who wait until they can to tend the broken bodies of those who suffer unjustly.

The People's History is also the SPC story. The biblical story insists it must be.

The question for us today is who we will choose to be as the terrible story continues to unfold. From terrorism in Moscow to bombardments in Kiev the terrible story continues to unfold. From hostages still held by Hamas to the flattening of Gaza with no end in sight the terrible story continues to unfold. From the lack of affordable housing and social support for our guests with the Overnight Shelter and The Community Cup in Martinsburg to pervasive food insecurity for our guests with Shepherdstown Shares the terrible story continues to unfold. From a bomb threat this week at Hedgesville High to the threats of a second Civil War as we barrel toward yet another high stakes presidential election the terrible story continues to unfold.

Who are we going to be in the midst of that story? Will we be Pilate and the priests and the soldiers and the scribes perpetuating unjust suffering through the power of religious tyranny? Or will we be Simon of Cyrene, carrying the cross for the outcast; will we be Joseph of Arimathea, risking our good name to tend the bodies of the broken; will we be the women who refuse to run away and hide their face from the shame of the worst humanity can do to one another?

I believe we can be the latter. I know for sure that we want to be.

Yes, the Terrible Story continues to unfold, but we can be part of The People's History, rooted in the promise of resurrection hope. When we choose *this* story, to the best of our ability, our song, too, in the words of our poet, *will grow into a tree, with fruit, multiplying truth*, with memory, light and joy.