

## **The Courage to Watch**

*March 28, 2010*

(Palm Sunday – Year C)

Luke 22:39-23:49

*St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas*

A few Sundays ago, a new original TV mini-series debuted on HBO. This TV mini-series is produced by Tom Hanks and is entitled “The Pacific.”

Tom Hanks got on board with the production of this series because he heard from so many veterans who had served in the Pacific theater of World War II about how they wished that someone in Hollywood would focus more on the Pacific, instead of the European theater.

These veterans wished that people would see a more realistic portrayal of World War II, from the perspective of the battles against Japan.

My grandfather served in the Pacific during World War II, yet I heard very, very few stories from my PaPa about his experiences fighting against the Japanese.

Because of my family history, I have always wanted to know more about that side of World War II,

And since I am a bit of a history buff, I have set our DVR to record each Sunday night episode of The Pacific.

This TV mini-series has no qualms about showing the horrors of war. Battlefield blood and gunshots at close range and severed limbs are all shown in graphic detail.

I usually have a pretty strong stomach for seeing that kind of graphic violence,

But in watching last week's episode of The Pacific, the episode that depicted the battles on Guadalcanal, the violence was such that it made me look briefly down into my lap, so as not to watch.

It takes courage to watch.

It takes courage to watch - as Jesus goes through pain and violence, a violence that ends with his death on a cross.

It takes courage to watch - as Jesus agonizes in the Garden of Gethsemane, pleading with God for the cup of death to pass by him.

It takes courage to watch - as Jesus is denied, three times, by his friend, Peter.

It takes courage to watch – as Jesus is handed over to the authorities, to be mocked and betrayed.

It takes courage to watch – as an innocent man dies between two criminals.

Yet I am so taken with how the writer of the Gospel of Luke ends his story of Jesus' death.

At the end of the story that we just heard, Luke writes this:  
“But all of his acquaintances, including the women who followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.”

Most of us would rather not watch violent or unpleasant things.  
We look down into our laps to avoid seeing dismembered bodies on the TV screen.

We look down into our laps to avoid seeing the denial, the betrayal and the bloody death of Jesus.

We look down into our laps to avoid seeing the child with Down Syndrome walking into the room.

We are not as courageous as the acquaintances of Jesus, including the women from Galilee, who stood and watched these things.

For it takes courage to watch.

In the Episcopal Church, this coming week is called Holy Week.

At St. Alban's, we offer worship services most every day this coming week.

These worship services will not have happy and cheery music.

Attending some of the worship services during Holy Week will mean that you will have to say 'no' to attending something else.

It is a fact that churches are not as full today, on the day when we watch Jesus die a violent death,

As they will be next Sunday, when everything will be sweetness and light.

And during this next week, this church will be open from 6am until 10pm each day for you to pray.

But the lights will be low and you will have these objects of art, contemplating Jesus' crucifixion, as your only companions.

If you are going to walk the way of the cross during Holy Week, it will take courage to watch.

Yet if we will not avert our eyes away from the unpleasantness and pain,  
If we will not look down into our laps during the battle scenes,  
If we will just have the courage to watch,  
It is my firm belief that it is in those darkest places in life, where we have an encounter with the living God.

It takes courage to watch as our best friend loses her hair from chemotherapy treatments.

It takes courage to watch as our children make choice after choice after choice that bring us pain and grief.

It takes courage to watch as our parents slip into the darkness of old age and frailty.

Yet if we will just muster up the courage to watch in those deep, dark moments, then we encounter God so profoundly.

If we will muster up the courage to watch,

Then we encounter God as we double over in silly laughter while buying a wig for our friend who is bald from her chemo treatments.

If we muster up the courage to watch,

Then we encounter God as we realize that our wayward and prodigal children have been given free will and undeserved love just like the rest of us.

If we muster up the courage to watch,

Then we encounter God as we appreciate, through our aging parents, the tenderness and fragility and uncertainty of human life.

When Jesus died two thousand years, his acquaintances, including the women who followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching.

If we will muster up the courage to not avert our eyes from the pain,  
If we will muster up the courage to watch, as the innocent Son of God is denied, betrayed, beaten and killed,  
Then we will encounter the living God, who shows us that nothing, nothing, ever, ever, ever, will separate us from love.

This Holy Week, look squarely at the Cross of Christ.  
Do not avert your eyes from the darkness.  
Have the courage - to watch.

AMEN.

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