

The Rev. Kristin Krantz  
St. James', Mt. Airy  
3/25/16

Good Friday  
Isaiah 52:13—53:12  
Psalm 22:1-22  
Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9  
John (18) 19:1-42

Today everything is stripped bare. We gather on this Good Friday to contemplate the death of Jesus.

As much as we may want to, we can't make the story either stop before Jesus dies, or fast forward to the empty tomb. Today we must linger with the broken body of Jesus.

The inevitability of the Good Friday story holds so much power, and yet it is the part of these three great days that I sometimes find the hardest to stay present in. I don't mind a taste of it, but I don't want to remain in it for too long – because then I might truly begin to feel the pain, the horror, and the loss that **is** this part of our story.

This is natural I think, and I'm pretty sure I'm not alone in that. It is hard to allow ourselves to really feel Jesus' death. We are okay *thinking* about it, but we only allow our *feelings* about it to go so deep. We might stay for a brief time, but we don't want to remain. We will glance at it, but to really watch it would be just too much—an invitation to **lose control** of ourselves.

When one of my boys was three years old, he showed me just that.

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I'm wondering if anyone here has seen the Veggie Tales movie *An Easter Carol*?

In case you are unaware of what the Veggie Tales are, they are a group of animated vegetables that tell stories from the Bible and reflect on virtues – such as *Dave and the Giant Pickle* for the story of David and Goliath, and *Larry Boy and the Rumor Weed* to explore how lies can grow and grow until they choke out life like a weed in the garden.

In *An Easter Carol*, as you might expect, we find a group of cucumbers, tomatoes, squash, peas, and an asparagus 'Tiny Tim', telling the Easter story through the familiar lens of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*.

You see, Ebenezer Ezzar is out of control. He wants to make Easter bigger and bigger, with more and more candy filled eggs, by pushing the robotic chickens in his factory to make more and more plastic eggs.

But that's not all. Still reeling from the death of his beloved Grandmother, he decides that in her memory he is going to buy the one place he knows she loved the most – her church – so that he can then tear it down and use the land to build 'Easter Egg Land – A Place Where Easter Never Ends!'

And so he finds himself going to bed on the eve of Easter (they evidently don't have an Easter Vigil in Veggie Tales land) when an egg sculpture he has releases a fairy named Hope who leads Ebenezer on a journey through his past, present, and into the future, to show him what the world will be like, without the hope of Easter, if he destroys the church.

It is in the church where Hope and Ebenezer end their time in the present, with her using the stained glass windows to sing the story of Jesus, before a very dramatic action takes them from Easter present to Easter future.

As the song is ending, and the camera pans to the brand new rose window of the resurrected Christ that Ebenezer's grandmother commissioned before she died, a huge wrecking ball suddenly smashes through the window – showing not only the impending destruction of the church, but also the obliteration of the hope of Easter.

It was at this point that my toddler boy freaked out. And I use that term mildly. Because upon seeing the wrecking ball tear through the window of Jesus, it was like a switch flipped inside of him and his reaction was purely visceral.

His body began shaking uncontrollably. He began to cry hysterically. He was clinging to me, and clawing at me, trying to climb into some safety my arms couldn't provide.

And he yelled. He just kept yelling and yelling, "Mama! They are killing Jesus! They are hurting God! Why? Why?"

It took me almost 15 minutes to calm him down. During that time my focus was solely on him and I hadn't turned off the movie – and that turned out to be a good thing. Because I had kept telling him that it was okay, this was only make-believe – that it was only pretend and wasn't real – and by the time he was through the shock, it was at a place in the movie where Ebenezer had made choices that kept the hope of Easter alive. There were happy images of people worshiping at the church on Easter morning – a church and its windows that were not broken.

It took *me* longer to let go of the shock and surge of emotions that his reaction to the movie had stirred up.

At the time it was because of the adrenaline rush that had kicked in and because of guilt I felt for not pre-screening the movie like a “good mother” should have (though I’m not sure I would have picked up on that as a trigger), and also because of the overwhelming feelings of protection and love I felt for my son.

But as I prayed about that experience, and as I shared the story with others, I realized another reason I kept coming back to it – and that’s the knowledge that I lied.

Jesus’ death isn’t make-believe. It isn’t pretend. It was real.

Jesus *was* killed and God *was* hurt.

That is the unavoidable and inescapable truth of Good Friday. And it has the power to bring us to our knees, if we only let go of the pretense of control we hold on to, and let ourselves feel the reality of this truth, the pain of this truth, even the abiding love of this truth.

Because as with all grieving, there is at the heart of our sorrow, love.

On this day we are called to dig a grave for Jesus in our hearts, a place where the brokenness may be laid, but more than that a place where the love of a God who became human to live among us – and whose love for us is bigger and more powerful than death – can make a home.

So today we dig deep. When we leave here today/tonight, my prayer is that we will truly keep Good Friday until we ring in Easter, doing this by taking the time to turn over the soil of our hearts, so that we will be able to plant the seed that is Jesus – the seed that will bring forth the hope of Easter and call us all into new life.

~ AMEN ~