**Love Holds Us Still
Good Friday, April 2, 2021, All Saints Church, Pasadena
The Rev. Dr. Sally Howard**

**Reading: Luke 23:44–56**

It is the end. Jesus’ breathing has stopped and his agony has ended, but for those who loved him most, it feels as though the pain and trauma will march on forever. They are not even allowed to touch him or tend to his lifeless body without permission from the very powers who took his life. This may sound too familiar to those who have tossed loved ones during the pandemic, but it is not a virus but human hate and cruelty that created the chasm they cannot freely cross. So they stand and wait in the gap, as we stand with them in this hour.

We have traveled this week with Jesus to this sacred moment. We have felt the pressure building and the constriction of increasingly narrow passage. The nearly inevitable collision between domination powers and Jesus’ passion has occurred. We stand in the gap, with the men and particularly the women, powerless to protect him, powerless to ease his pain, and finally, powerless to save his life.

We all know in some way what that pain is like. It might be bearing witness to bodies of color blown to the ground by bullets or bullets aimed at Asian women and men, or knee to a fragile neck. We feel small and powerlessness to halt the grinding forces of violent domination. It might be the constrictions of COVID that isolate us, or prevent us from visiting someone we love who is ill or in the hospital. We stand in the bleakness of separation, the shadow of death. It is hard to breathe! And many of us, too many of us have suffered the death of someone we love that we cannot touch or be physically close to. Such anguish! Such pain and fear that without our presence, the ones we love have died alone. Even in death the bodies of our beloved ones stay out of touch, waiting to be honored. As memorials stack up, we wait and wait until we can grieve together. What in God’s name can help us?

Love. Love can help us in all the gaps and chasms of our lives. Love that recognizes no barriers, that leaps fences and penetrates walls. It is the only thing that can rend all the curtains of separation in this world to arrive at its destination. And it was the women so close to Jesus who knew and trusted the power of love. Because of love, they stayed through the earthquake and the darkened sky. Through the death of the other two men crucified with him. Through the sudden quiet and inevitable return to urbane chatter and business as usual, they stayed.

Of those women of love, there are three named in another gospel. Three Mary’s. Mary Magdalene whose own mind and body had been restored by the healing power of Jesus to become his lead disciple. Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha, whose lavish tears and hair had caressed Jesus’ feet just before he entered Jerusalem. And Mary, Jesus’ mother, whose fiercely courageous love had birthed him and held him tenderly to breast, undaunted by the knowledge that his life’s course would pierce her own heart.

It was Mary his mother whose love and encouragement at a wedding in Cana three years before, had given him the courage to acknowledge his calling and step into his deepest self. It was Mary his mother who knew who he was and what he was capable of doing. This Mary was no stranger to the ways systems of violent domination behave towards those who challenge their authority and power. She must have known that the path ahead was dangerous and that it was almost inevitable that Jesus’ passion and compassion, would lead to collision with those very forces. And Jesus must have been afraid, but because of Mary’s love, he could do what he was sent to do. HIs mother loved Jesus into his future.

Mary, sister of Lazarus, knew who Jesus was and the depth of God’s compassion and power within him that could bring life out of death. Just one week before Jesus’ death, she had knelt at a crowded dinner table, to break an alabaster jar filled with priceless perfume.  Hands to feet. Hair to skin.  Mary didn’t need words; her yearning, her worship, her gratitude, and her love were expressed and enacted through her body.  Just as Jesus later broke bread with his disciples, Mary broke open the jar in her hands and allowed its contents to pour freely over Jesus’s feet. Jesus, rather than shunning her intimate gesture, received Mary’s gift into his own body with gratitude, tenderness, pleasure, and blessing.  The holy sacraments there were skin, salt, sweat, and tears.  The instruments of worship were perfumed feet and unbound hair.  This was not an abstract piety of the mind; it was love manifested in physical extravagance.

Immediately after Mary anointed Jesus, he entered the city of Jerusalem, whose perimeter was already spotted with crucified bodies. He received Mary’s love and took it with him into Jerusalem. He acted out her love as he washed the feet of his disciples, especially when he washed the feet of Judas who was about to betray him, and Peter who would deny him. I think he felt once again Mary’s gentle touch, when he was beaten. He held on to Mary’s love, desperately, when he hung on that cross. I think he remembered the love of these women when he bowed his head and said, “It is finished.”

Jesus was loved into his future of ultimate solidarity with all those who suffer, by those who loved him. And then, Jesus took all of that love into the tomb, and it loved him into his future as the resurrection and the life.

That same love holds us this day. The inexhaustible love of She Who Is, creator of all that is, surrounds us and abides in us. She holds us as she did Jesus and the women who stayed, and the men who found their way, and the unnamed others. In our anguish in the gaps of our lives and the nightmares of hate and white supremacy, love stands with us still. And dear ones, Love holds all those whom we have lost and could not hold. God’s love crosses all the chasms of our lives, those we create and those we don’t. It recognizes no barriers, leaps fences and penetrates walls, rending all the curtains of separation this world has to offer. Love will arrive at its destination, even when we cannot.

How we have longed to be like the women who stayed with Jesus, at least able to be in sight! In our own time enveloped in the Karios time of God, we are there, at this moment holding him and all those we could not, in the love of God. As we have journeyed this week to this sacred moment, let us carry the love of Mary the mother, and Mary the beloved friend with us. Let us receive, like Jesus, the extravagant love of She Who Is, the creator of all that exists. Then may we love each other into our own future of solidarity with all who suffer and are lost in this world.

*Oh God,*

*Our body is still*

*and our soul is silent*

*as we listen for the renewing springs of your Spirit*

*deep in the ground of our being*

*and in earth’s quietness all around.*

*God of compassion, lead us further within,*

*that we may know you as the Beyond.*

*In the sufferings of our heart*

*and the brokenness of creation*

*may we be guided to You as in and beyond all that has life.*

*Amen*