
We Are Here, Yet We Are There

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**A sermon by Canon Wallace Marsh
Good Friday**

There they crucified him ... (John 19:18)

About a year ago I did something I promised never to do—I preached at the funeral of a family member.

Many years ago when I was approved for ordination, I introduced a new rule into the Marsh Family System—Go to church and get to know your priest because I didn't want to function as the family priest. I wasn't Father Wallace. I was Wallace, the son (prodigal son).

So, about this time last year, when Grandmother Jan was in her last days, I was taken aback when my father asked me if I would deliver the homily at the funeral. Had he forgotten my family rule? I had been very clear—I shall not function as family priest! I told my father that I would think about it, but was concerned about how I would be emotionally.

As I prayed about it for the next few days, it became clear that my father was a model son, a lot like the beloved disciple in today's passion. Dad loved his mother and was present to her: He took her to every doctor's appointment, hand delivered her mail on his way to work, took her on a weekly Walmart outing, and smuggled in fast food to the assisted living. If I did not preach, out of love for his mother, Dad would attempt to get in the pulpit. It would be extremely difficult for him and hard for the family to watch, so moved with pity, I said "yes."

But, I also found myself saying "yes" for another reason. There was a story about my grandmother that had been kept a secret. She told me keep it quiet, but her funeral seemed like the occasion to tell it.

My grandmother was not a churchgoer or a deeply spiritual lady. That is why I was shocked by her actions in the spring of 2006, during my second year of seminary, what is called the middler year (the half-way point). That year I was experiencing what mystics call "a dark night of the soul." I struggled to find meaning: Why was I in seminary? Had Jesus really called me? Should I stay or go? I called my Grandmother Jan and shared my questions with her, because her gift of the spirit (and the reason she didn't have many friends) was that she had this uncanny ability to be painful honest. She could slice you and dice you.

It baffles me to this day that Grandmother Jan never said anything. Not once did she comment on my spiritual or vocational questions. She just listened and then one day she spoke.

It happened when I told her a priest invited me to join his parish on a trip to Jerusalem and that I was thinking about going, and she immediately said, "You must go! Go and see it!"

"I cannot sign up yet," I said, "I have some concerns."

"What are they?" She asked.

"Well, Mom and Dad aren't really thrilled about me spending spring break in the Middle East. For once they are advocating Cancun and Panama City!" I replied.

"They will get over it," she responded.

I said, "Grandmother, my main reservation about going on the trip is that it would leave me with little to no money in my emergency fund, and I needed that fund as a seminarian with little income."

Grandmother said, "Sign up for the trip and if your car breaks down or you have a major expense that you cannot cover, call me." So, I signed up!

A few weeks before the trip I received a card in the mail from Grandmother Jan. I opened it and to my surprise there was a check that covered most of my trip with a beautiful note saying,

You need to go to Jerusalem. Go, enjoy, let your faith be transformed.
Love Grandmother Jan.
PS. Do not tell your parents that I gave you this gift.

My faith was transformed by that trip, but in an unusual way. It happened at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Church built over the place of the crucifixion. It was a great gift to be there in Jerusalem, an amazing gift to kneel at the place where Jesus was crucified, but the greatest gift, the gift of grace, was realizing that I had been there before!

Let me explain what I mean by that:

Episcopal Bishop Jeffrey Rowthorne once said "Anglican Eucharistic Theology is summed up in three words: There, Here, Here."ⁱ

There. Literally, there on the cross at Golgotha it was "there by his one oblation of himself once offered, a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world."ⁱⁱ

Here. Here in this space. Here at this moment. Here we go back There.

Ironically, it took a 3,000 mile trip to Jerusalem to realize kneeling in prayer Here was just as powerful, real and spiritual as being There!

We are Here, Yet we are There!

We are Here. Everything about us is Here""our brokenness, sins, suffering, illnesses, relationships, and questions about God. We bring them Here with us, yet we are There!

Realizing this is important because *everything about our lives Here finds its meaning There!*

Because There is where we see God's love for us Here. There is where we see that perhaps God goes too farⁱⁱⁱ by incarnating everything we are experiencing Here in our lives!

Here at this place. Here at this hour. Here in prayer, we are There!

Finally, **Here.**^{iv}

We must leave Here. We leave Here having been transformed by what happened There. We leave Here new people because we have been There. We leave Here with new understanding about ourselves""offering our selves, our souls and bodies"^v

to God because we have been There.

We leave Here today as people of "faith, hope and love"^{vi} because we have been There.

Thanks be to God that when we are Here we are There!

ⁱThe Rt. Rev Jeffrey Rowthorne spoke these words in a lecture at Yale Divinity School in 2006.

ⁱⁱThe Book of Common Prayer, 334

ⁱⁱⁱTaken from a quote by John Paul II regarding Jesus' crucifixion: "In truth it seems that He [God] has gone as far as possible. He could not go further. In a certain sense, God has gone too far."

^{iv}There, Here, Here

^vThe Book of Common Prayer, 336

^{vi}1 Corinthians 13: 13