

**A broken hallelujah**  
Good Friday at 7:00 p.m.

Psalm 27:1-5&13, 14 – John 19: 16b-30 – Rev. Jim Cullen

On March 10<sup>th</sup> there was ceremony to induct new people into the Rock and Roll hall of Fame in New York City. Much of the TV coverage had to do with the fact that Madonna was one of the inductees. Of more interest to me was that Montreal born Leonard Cohen was another inductee. I did not see the ceremony, but understand that Damien Rice sang one of his compositions, “Hallelujah”. In my opinion this song has been sung brilliantly by Patricia O’Callaghan, and less well by kdlang. It is an inspired song. The song includes these words. *“There’s a blaze of light in every word. It doesn’t matter which you heard. The holy or the broken Hallelujah. Hallelujah.”*

Tonight I would like to focus on the words ... a broken hallelujah. We use the word “hallelujah” for Palm Sunday and we use it on Easter Sunday and throughout the year in various ways when we celebrate victory and hope. That being the case, then, I think on Good Friday we experience the “broken hallelujah. Something has gone horribly wrong. For the disciples, women and men, who followed Jesus, this day was beyond belief. Even Pilate and Herod did not think that this is what should happen to Jesus.

A broken hallelujah is a dream that falls apart, a friendship that gone bad, a hope that is lost, and a future that is dim, an expectation stopped in its tracks. The crucifixion is a broken hallelujah; love and praise offered up and rejected, ignored or feared. And Jesus said, ***“It is finished.” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*** His body broken - his blood shed – the sorrow and love flowed mingled down. Jesus becomes vulnerable. His life is in the hands of others. He knew that this was the direction of his life and he would experience the brokenness. He feels cut off from family and friends, even God. The brokenness is his last gift to his followers. His brokenness becomes his ultimate trust in God. His brokenness is his letting his life flow from time to eternity. His brokenness is his gathering up the weakness of all humanity and giving it dignity. His brokenness is his connection with all the struggles of humans who seek justice and freedom.

The crucifixion is about the integrity of Jesus and the compassion of God. This is the point where in the midst of all that is wrong God meets us.

In December 1982, the 21 year old son of William Sloan Coffin, then pastor of Riverside Church in New York City, drove off a bridge into Boston harbor and drowned. Trying to comfort Coffin, a woman said to him, “I just don’t understand God’s will.” Angrily, Coffin shouted back at her. “I’ll say you don’t understand God will, lady. Do you think that it was the will of God that Alex never fixed that lousy windshield wiper; that Alex was probably driving too fast in such a storm; that Alex probably had too much to drink? Do you think it is God’s will there are no street lights along such a stretch of road; no guard rail separating the road from the Boston Harbor?

Coffin later commented, “For some reason I can’t get it through people’s heads that God doesn’t run around the world pulling trigger fingers, clenching knives, turning steering wheels. God is dead set against all kinds of unnatural deaths. This is not to say there are no unnatural deaths. There are. But the one thing that should never be said about any violent death like Alex’s death is that it is the will of God. My own consolation lies in knowing that it was not the will of God that Alex died – but that when the waves closed over the sinking car, God’s heart was the first of all hearts to break.”

It is Jesus' brokenness that identifies him with the weak, the lost, the suffering, the abandoned and the forgotten. This is a key part of our journey to Easter. It is our brokenness that enables us to gather up others around us, to lift people up and give people hope.

Some time ago on CBC radio I heard part of an interview. I don't know what the first part was all about. It was a conversation between a man and a boy who was dealing with some difficulty. The man says to the boy, "it will be all right in the end." The boy replies, "And what if it isn't? To which the man replied, then it is not the end"

The broken hallelujahs of Good Friday are before us. But they are replaced with the holy hallelujahs of Easter. It is despair before hope, the pain before pleasure, death before life, past before future. The holy hallelujah is God raising us up on eagle's wings, bearing us on the breath of dawn, making us to shine like the sun, and holding us in the palm of his hand.

We go from this service tonight, knowing that this is not the end. Out of the tough stuff of life God will raise us up.