**Message for Good Friday Joint Service: “I Am He”**

St. Andrew’s United Church March 25, 2016 -

Based on John 18:1-10

By the Rev. Dr. Bill Steadman

Being clear about our existence, the life we live and the purpose of what we do, is the basic element of the biblical story. In the story of creation, light is the first act of creation, for we need light to allow there to be life as we know it, and we need life from the natural realm to nurture and support human life.

When Moses is asking for the true nature of God, he gets back an answer variously translated “I AM Who I AM” or “I Will Be Who I Will Be.”

The very essence of life is the day by day existence that we share, which marks the essence of human reality, and divine reality.

So it is not surprising that we uphold on a pedestal those who will stand for what they believe, who will back-up what they have said, and who will not run from what is important to them.

So strong is that feeling that I believe many times people get elected to political office who may not seem to hold views that most, or even many people would hold themselves but if these individuals are consistent in expressing their ideas and speak and act with self-assurance in the implementation of those ideas, then people support them.

A prime example of standing up for what one believes and thinks can be found in the life of Jesus. There is no evidence that he backed away from what was expected from him. Oh, there were times when he may have showed some hesitation, but ultimately he operated by the overall principle “Not my will, but God’s will be done.”

Some say it takes courage to stand up for what we believe, and stand by what we have said or done, but in truth I find it takes far more energy to try to cover up for what may have happened in the past, and to run from what we have done, no matter how disappointing or embarassing it may be.

There always is a price to pay when we do not stand up for our convictions, and the beginning of the Good Friday story, the arrest of Jesus and the process of seeking to humiliate him in public, is balanced by a strong leader who is willing to stand by what he said, taught and did.

Clarity of thought and understanding of the faith is a deeply personal experience.

Membership classes within the church once had a formula as to what we should believe, and a catechism, or series of questions with accepted answers attached to those questions, were shared that potential confirmands and members were required to know or at least refer to when expressing their faith.

I am pleased we no longer see faith as a set formula, or a rigidly defined array of answers about what we believe. This day we face the darkness of Good Friday which also is, for us, a personal experience that can only be expressed by our individual understandings and our personal journey of faith.

The issue is not having all of the right answers about Jesus, the Trinity, even life eternal, but the real issue is: “Can I stand up and accept who I am, and seek to live as fully as I can as a child of God.”

Fear and uncertainty are found in the journey of life, but all is liberated when we can stand tall and confidently and accept who we are, what we believe, and where we seek to go into the future.

Living life afraid or on the run never brings wholeness. Even if wrongly accused of something, standing and facing our accusers is always the courageous and healing act.

Jesus in the end did not run and hide. He faced attack, torture, and suffering even unto death. Yet he said by his words and his actions: All that I stood for, and all that I shared, cannot be destroyed by the attacks of this moment.

Jesus in his baptism began a journey like the prophets of old: “Here I am; take me.” If only we could be as clear, and as courageous, in our own acts of faithfulness, whatever we face.