

Good Friday Stations of the City

Delivered at Harvard Square, Outside the Holyoke Center, Cambridge, MA

March 29, 2002

Station X – “They Divided His Clothing by Casting Lots”

(Mat 27:33-37 NRSV)

<sup>33</sup> And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), <sup>34</sup> they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. <sup>35</sup> And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; <sup>36</sup> then they sat down there and kept watch over him. <sup>37</sup> Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."

+++++

The apostle Paul was never more right than when he asked, “Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” (1 Corinthians 1:20)

On Good Friday “They divided his clothes among them by casting lots.” On another occasion Jesus had told his own disciples, “Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money--not even an extra tunic.” (Luke 9:3) So there he hung on a cross on Good Friday. Those who nailed him there knelt below him and divided up his net worth, maybe a tunic and a pair of sandals, no more. The wise and the powerful knelt below him; the Roman guard counted the booty and thought it the measure of Jesus’ value. It is foolish wisdom which prizes a tattered garment and sole-worn shoes but overlooks the value of a person’s life. It is foolish wisdom which grabs onto the rags which give cover to a person, and ignore what the covering covers. It is foolish wisdom, which settles for Jesus’ clothes when he willingly wanted to give them so many more riches.

Foolish wisdom is not just foolish. That would be tragedy enough, for its foolishness sends us tramping after illusions and counting worn out goods as the treasures of life. But foolish wisdom isn’t just an un-fulfilling tragedy for those seduced by it. Foolish wisdom is also a dangerous and hurtful thing. For by foolish wisdom some are made to wear rags and live in no homes and be thought of as worth no more than the tatters they inhabit. By foolish wisdom the rich and powerful kneel and divide the resources of the earth into their playthings, while the planet itself groans on the cross, dying from its wounds. By foolish wisdom small-minded dogmas lay claim to the truth and gladly crucify those whose sexual orientation, or whose questioning of policies, or whose belief that other religions may be as efficacious as their own – those persuaded by foolish wisdom gladly crucify those do not measure up to the standard of their small-minded truth.

A grotesque picture this is. The word of glory, who promised them wholeness and life abundant, strung up, deemed less than worthless while they divide his worthless clothing by casting lots. One day they will ask in stunned amazement, “When did we not see thee, Lord?” And the answer will be, “Every day. Every day you did not see me. Right up to the very end you missed me altogether, too busy you were, dicing for nothing.”