

Good Friday

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Psalm 22

Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9

John 18:1-19:42

O Lord Jesus,
the events of this day
are too much for us.

And yet, we have gathered.
We are here
to walk them with you.

In your mercy,
open the eyes of our hearts,
that we may see
what the *people* have done,
what *we* have done,
what *you* have done.

We watch as you leave
the high priest's house
and are taken to the praetorium.

The scourging is awful;
it is no light affair.
They strip you down, Lord,
naked and cowering
in front of the entire cohort of soldiers.
You are already battered and bruised
from what the high priest and his clergy have done;
your eyes and cheeks are already swollen;
your body is already soiled
from the agony
of your bloody sweat
the night before.

But still,
they flog you
with thick, heavy reeds,
striking your buttocks,
your shoulders,
your back
with ferocious fervor.

Others strike you with whips,
which are designed
not just to brace or to sting,
but to cut and to tear.
In lightning quick flashes
they split your skin
faster than you created the universe.
The iron-rich smell of blood—
your blood—
is in the air.

And you
say
nothing.

They seem so angry,
so vicious,
so mocking,
but the truth is that
they have no personal beef with you.
This is just part of their job,
and—truth be told—
it is one of the more
enjoyable parts.
It's a release,
an escape from all the stresses
of being foreign occupiers
in a foreign land
over an uncooperative
and foreign people.
But for the release to work
—for this to feel like relief—
you cannot really be human,
and neither can they.

To them,
you are less than human,
so that they can be
less than human
to you.

And you
say
nothing.

As they beat you and batter you,

one of the soldiers
cuts a thick, green, thorny branch
from a bush nearby.
“Didn’t they say
he said
he was ‘King of the Jews?’”
He wraps it into a circle,
a halo,
a crown,
and careful to avoid the thorns
with his own fingers,
he tightens it to your head
and pierces your brow.
The fit is just right.

And you
say
nothing.

Another finds a piece
of purple cloth
and hangs it over
your wincing shoulders.

A third completes the tableau
with one of the reeds
he had used to beat you,
and he thrusts it
into your hand
like a scepter.

And you
say
nothing.

They laugh and laugh,
deep from their bellies,
deep in their throats.
Your nation is so small;
your people are so insignificant;
and so are you.
The differential in power
is hilarious to them.

And so they encircle you.
They mock-bow and laughingly yell,

“Hail, King of the Jews!”
Others spit on your face
and in your wounds.
Another urinates at your feet.
You are a worm and no man,
scorned by all
and despised by the people.

And you
say
nothing.

They parade you up the street.
We stand and watch.
We cheer.
We jeer.
We shout “crucify!”

But let us be clear:
it is not God
who demands
a blood sacrifice.

It is us.

And you
say
nothing.

And at the last,
they hoist you up,
and they nail you down.

All of this is
an excruciating and exact science.
These people are professionals;
they have done this before.
They know that the nails must be placed
not too far to the right
nor too far the left,
or else they might pierce an artery,
and death would come far too fast.

Instead,
they catch your wrists ‘just so,’
so that your body will turn

against itself.
You will suffer,
you will asphyxiate,
you will expire.

The cruelty here is that
your body will become
its own executioner,
able to breathe in,
but unable to breathe out.
And yet the irony is that
this manner of execution,
this kind of crucifixion,
is the only means of death
we've ever devised
that cannot be self-imposed.
Crucifixion
takes collusion.
It takes complicity.
It takes a volunteer
to nail a man to a tree.

This place smells
like blood,
and wood,
and iron,
and spit,
and sweat,
and urine,
and dung.

Truth be told,
it smells like your nativity
those thirty-three
years ago.

And you
say
nothing.

Lord,
it is scandalous,
it is damnable,
it is unfathomable
and unacceptable

how
your
divinity
hides
here

wrapped in blood
and enshrouded in the flesh
of a battered victim,
a husk of a man.

Your *divinity* hides
within flesh bruised and torn.

Your *wisdom* hides
within a crowd of ignorance.

Your *power* hides
under the whips and spittle of thugs.

Your *glory* hides
behind the shame of nudity,
the shame of weakness,
the shame of powerlessness,
the shame of utter insignificance.

It hides.

Or does it hide at all?

Perhaps
this is
your very kingdom,
your very power,
your very glory . . .

on display.

Amen.