

COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION
SUNDAY 10 APRIL 2022- Palm Sunday

COLLECT

True and humble king,
hailed by the crowd as Messiah:
grant us the faith to know you and love you,
that we may be found beside you
on the way of the cross, which is the path of glory. Amen.

Psalm 31: 9-16

- 9 Have mercy on me, Lord, for I am in trouble; ♦
my eye is consumed with sorrow,
my soul and my body also.
- 10 For my life is wasted with grief,
and my years with sighing; ♦
my strength fails me because of my affliction,
and my bones are consumed.
- 11 I have become a reproach to all my enemies
and even to my neighbours,
an object of dread to my acquaintances; ♦
when they see me in the street they flee from me.
- 12 I am forgotten like one that is dead, out of mind; ♦
I have become like a broken vessel.
- 13 For I have heard the whispering of the crowd;
fear is on every side; ♦
they scheme together against me,
and plot to take my life.
- 14 But my trust is in you, O Lord. ♦
I have said, 'You are my God.
- 15 'My times are in your hand; ♦
deliver me from the hand of my enemies,
and from those who persecute me.
- 16 'Make your face to shine upon your servant, ♦
and save me for your mercy's sake.'

Isaiah 50: 4-9a

The Servant's Humiliation and Vindication

⁴The Lord GOD has given me

the tongue of a teacher,^[a]

that I may know how to sustain

the weary with a word.

Morning by morning he wakens—

wakens my ear

to listen as those who are taught.

⁵The Lord GOD has opened my ear,

and I was not rebellious,

I did not turn backwards.

⁶I gave my back to those who struck me,

and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard;

I did not hide my face

from insult and spitting.

⁷The Lord GOD helps me;

therefore I have not been disgraced;

therefore I have set my face like flint,

and I know that I shall not be put to shame;

⁸ he who vindicates me is near.

Who will contend with me?

Let us stand up together.

Who are my adversaries?

Let them confront me.

⁹It is the Lord GOD who helps me;

who will declare me guilty?

Luke 23: 1-49

Jesus before Pilate

23 Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus^[a] before Pilate. **2** They began to accuse him, saying, 'We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king.'^[b] **3** Then Pilate asked him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' He answered, 'You say so.' **4** Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, 'I find no basis for an accusation against this man.' **5** But they were insistent and said, 'He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place.'

Jesus before Herod

6 When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. **7** And when he learned that he was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him off to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. **8** When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had been wanting to see him for a long time, because he had heard about him and was hoping to see him perform some sign. **9** He questioned him at some length, but Jesus^[c] gave him no answer. **10** The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. **11** Even Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then he put an elegant robe on him, and sent him back to Pilate. **12** That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies.

Jesus Sentenced to Death

13 Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people, **14** and said to them, 'You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him. **15** Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death. **16** I will therefore have him flogged and release him.'^[d]

18 Then they all shouted out together, 'Away with this fellow! Release Barabbas for us!' **19** (This was a man who had been put in prison for an insurrection that had taken place in the city, and for murder.) **20** Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again; **21** but they kept shouting, 'Crucify, crucify him!' **22** A third time he said to them, 'Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death; I will therefore have him flogged and then release him.' **23** But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified; and their voices prevailed. **24** So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted. **25** He released the man they asked for, the one who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder, and he handed Jesus over as they wished.

The Crucifixion of Jesus

26 As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus. **27** A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. **28** But Jesus turned to them and said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. **29** For the days are surely coming when they will say, "Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never

nursed.” ³⁰ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, “Fall on us”; and to the hills, “Cover us.” ³¹ For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?’

³² Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. ³³ When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus^[e] there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. [[³⁴ Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.’]]^[f] And they cast lots to divide his clothing. ³⁵ And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, ‘He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah^[g] of God, his chosen one!’ ³⁶ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, ³⁷ and saying, ‘If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!’ ³⁸ There was also an inscription over him,^[h] ‘This is the King of the Jews.’

³⁹ One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding^[i] him and saying, ‘Are you not the Messiah?^[j] Save yourself and us!’ ⁴⁰ But the other rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?’ ⁴¹ And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.’ ⁴² Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into^[k] your kingdom.’ ⁴³ He replied, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.’

The Death of Jesus

⁴⁴ It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land^[l] until three in the afternoon, ⁴⁵ while the sun’s light failed;^[m] and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.’ Having said this, he breathed his last. ⁴⁷ When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, ‘Certainly this man was innocent.’^[n] ⁴⁸ And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. ⁴⁹ But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

Reflection from Hannah

It's rather dizzying to receive the full story of Good Friday all in one go, isn't it? We are left reeling; stunned by the way events unfold and the tragedy of an innocent life being snuffed out. As we enter Holy Week, remembering how the cries of 'hosanna!' gave way to the shouts of 'crucify!', our Gospel reading anticipates the darkest moment and forces us to face it- head on.

There is one phrase in the middle of the passage, that is so telling. As the women are weeping, distraught, Jesus tells them not to, for worse is to come. Then he makes the rather wry observation:

'For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?'

What indeed. It is human folly that conspires to kill Jesus. All of the elements that we recognise as playing a role in injustice in the world today are at play. There are the issues of ego and public image for both Pilate and Herod. There is the characteristic 'dialogue of the deaf' as Pilate tries (and fails) to understand exactly what the High Priests' issue is. That misunderstanding results in the sardonically meant (but true) sign above Jesus' head- 'This is the King of the Jews'. There is mob rule, as the crowds call for Barabbas to be saved; and there are those caught in the fallout-like poor Simon of Cyrene, who is forced to carry the cross.

The worst notes of the human condition are there for all to see- and, as Christ says, this is what can happen even when 'the wood is green'. At the heart of this saying is the image of life- Jesus is the green wood, as opposed to the dry wood, which is dead and only good for burning. But it is the green wood- flourishing and verdant- that will be destroyed.

God-with-us. The Messiah. The Lord. The one who was promised... Jesus is pure love, and when that love stands before the flawed systems humans create to wield power and perpetuate fear, what do we do? We kill it.

We can perhaps be tempted to hope that if Christ were on trial today, we would do something different. One of the biggest risks to our understanding of ourselves is the assumption of a more progressive moral code in our day- that in these sophisticated, more technologically developed times, we've somehow 'moved on'. We haven't. The world continues to conspire to kill love- sometimes in subtle ways, through unjust systems that bind and suppress; and sometimes in the obvious horror of mutilated, tortured bodies on the streets of Bucha and Borodyanka.

Whilst we are rightly shocked by the war, terror, evil at work in the world, we can recognise in Luke's description of the death of Jesus both the folly of humanity (that is the same now as it was then); and the faithful goodness of God. Christ walks the way of the cross *all* the way- never turning, doggedly focused and never ceasing to minister love and life and healing as he goes. So let's walk with him this Holy Week. We know the ending is life, and that the story isn't over when darkness falls that terrible Friday with the temple curtain being torn in two; but for now we linger in Christ's passion, letting it speak to a world full of longing.