

The Voices of Good Friday - April 18, 2014  
By Wayne J Schneider

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Isaiah 52: 13-53: 12; Psalm 22; John 18: 1-19:42

There are readings and days during the Christian year that need little or no exposition. Tonight is such a time, and these readings are such readings. This liturgical journey we've been on since Advent is in many ways a familiar one. We know how to do Christmas. Epiphany is nice. Think of something meaningful but not too difficult to abstain from during Lent. Then it's Palm Sunday; Easter. The story rolls on into Pentecost and beyond.

But today we pause to observe and contemplate the suffering of our Lord. The assigned lectionary passages for this day are among the most familiar in all of scripture. We hear of God's suffering servant in Isaiah. We hear the cry of dereliction in Psalm 22. We hear Peter's denial, Pilate's exasperation, and Jesus' calm commitment to the path before him in St. John's gospel. I fear, however, that in our attempts to grasp the meaning and import of such passages, we may be silencing the texts themselves. It may be simpler to fill our ears with theological words or exegetical explanations rather than listening to the texts themselves, so for the next few minutes, join me in listening to the voices of Good Friday.

Listen to one of God's choice servants. His humanness is hardly noticeable. He is utterly familiar with rolled eyes and pointed fingers. He knows the absence of eye contact and the distance of avoidance. He is told that God has forsaken him. He bears the shortcomings of those who hate him. He swallows the rejection he is offered. He is taken before justice only to have it tum away. His innocence is a curse, his purity a burden. He provides no rebuttal, yet he calls out in a deafening and defiant silence. His future is unlike his past. His demise is inextricably tied to the righteousness of those who taunt and ridicule. Somehow his death is their gain

Are you listening?

Hear the voice of another servant. She admits that God is holy and enthroned on the praises of the people. She tells of how her ancestors trusted for generations and experienced deliverance instead of shame. She recalls a time when God safeguarded her every move, but not now.

Not anymore. She laments God's absence. She wonders aloud why God stepped away in her moment of greatest need. Countless naysayers and enemies are nearer to her than

the God of her ancestors. There is neither saliva in her mouth nor flesh on her bones. Her groans fall on deaf ears. Death is certain. Yet she hopes for deliverance, for a future unlike the past. She longs to see the face of God again, but her life is in God's hands.

Are you listening?

We also hear a confused voice on this day. He is quick to draw his sword, but slow to acknowledge the one for whom he draws it. He joins himself to slaves and the police, opting for anonymity and warmth. "*I am not one of his disciples,*" he retorts again . . . and again. There is resentment in his voice. There is fear in his voice. A rooster is crowing.

Are you listening?

Hear another confused voice. He is trying to understand the situation. He can't decide whether to follow the voice of reason or the cry of the crowd. He's interrogating the accused about being "*the King of the Jews.*" He insists he's in control of the situation, yet he's inquiring about truth. He finds no fault with the accused. He's less insistent about being in control as the situation deteriorates. He releases a bandit. "Here is the man!" "*Here is your king!*" What is truth? He knows he's lost control.

Are you listening?

Hear one last voice. "*I am the one you are looking for.*" "*Put your sword away.*" "*My kingdom is not of this world.*" "*Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to me.*" Are you listening? These are voices of rejection, suffering, confusion, pain, innocence, abandonment, anguish, searching, blaming, injustice, confidence, and silence. These are the voices of Good Friday.

Are you listening?

Allelujah. Amen.