

Good Friday

Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-8

John 18 & 19

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear. — The Epistle to the Hebrews, the fifth chapter, the seventh verse.

+In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

He cried out to God. God was able to save him from death. And didn't.

In other words, *we have a high priest who in every respect has been tested as we are.* Jesus is, in his passion, perfectly ordinary; in God's refusal to intervene, perfectly like the rest of us.

The risk that Christians run is that we fetishise the passion of the Christ. Having forgotten, as we are wont to do, that Jesus of Nazareth is a

human being just like us, we forget also that suffering and dying in divine silence is the lot of most, if not all, human beings.

[Some of you were here earlier, when a man stormed in, drunk and angry, railing against the state and capitalism and the church, shouting that God did not exist. And he's not wrong. For so many—for him, for Christ himself in the garden—God doesn't. They suffer alone.]

This is just what humans do. We suffer, and we die; alone, even if surrounded by living, breathing bodies, who keep on their living and breathing long after they've left the hospital room, in it our rapidly cooling corpse. Jesus suffers and dies because he is human. He suffers and dies of his humanity.

Not all humans are murdered, of course, except in the sense that all death is murder, all death is imposed upon us, if not by malicious intent, then by cancers and viruses, by poverty and pollution, by forces beyond our control, whether economic or evolutionary. Even to die of old age is a

misnomer; it is just to die because our bodies can no longer withstand the corrosive effects of living in a world of genetic copying errors, carcinogens, and constant assaults on our immune systems.

All the same, not all humans are murdered. Not all of us are wrongfully accused by our own people and tried in kangaroo courts and tortured with the blessing of the state and executed for political convenience. Then again, maybe more of us are than we think, and not just the tens of thousands of forgotten others that the Roman Empire subjected to crucifixion. Our instruments of death are more subtle now, in any case. Murder is easier when we don't have to smell rust and blood; when we don't even have to whisper *crucify, crucify*.

Consumer choices cost lives when commodities are traded on the backs of anonymous others working to death in fields and factories hidden from our flatscreen televisions. Or, not working at all; replaced by the efficiency of automation.

Political decisions cost lives when funding is cut from efforts to reduce poverty and homelessness and to provide mental health services, and when the Church has not stepped up enough, not nearly enough. When boys and girls we have never met are armed and dropped across borders far from ours. The minimum age to sign up in this country is 16; the average age, 20. When we wring our hands about taking in refugees. 207,000 civilians have been killed by the Syrian regime; 24,00 of them children. When the ice is melting and the sea is rising and some people subsist near low-lying coasts: a cool 22 million in Vietnam; 50 million in China; entire islands in the Pacific. All just numbers, and people.

The Sanhedrin conspire in boardrooms and parliament houses now. The innocent are crucified by trade deals and the *realpolitik* of mutually assured destruction and proportional responses and preemptive strikes. We kid ourselves if we don't think that our ballots and wallets are weapons.

And, of course, we murder ourselves in exactly the same ways. Our hunger for national security and our thirst for retribution damns us into suicidal cycles of paranoid violence. Our obsession for mass extraction and production brings poison to our breath, to the water and soil that feed our bellies. In killing each other, we kill ourselves. And we do so unthinkingly, unknowingly, sleepwalking.

This is just what humans do. We die, and we rob other humans of their agency and of their lives, when it is expedient for us so to do, except that it ends up killing us as well. And so we killed him because what else would we do to someone whose humanity reveals our own inhumanity. And he is killed because that is the cost of wholly nonviolent resistance against inhumanity, resistance that even heals those who seek to kill.

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Behold, therefore, the man; the man who drinks of the cup that we all drink, that we hand to him to drink, the vinegar of our own making,

poisoned with all the things that compromise our humanity, which may well boil down to our clawing desire to escape our mortality.

Behold, therefore, the man who would rather die than live lives like we do, in our petty insecurities expressed in acts of violence both great and small, unto others and upon ourselves. His acceptance of death is the opposite of our thoughtless suicide, as it is not fear that brings him to the cross, but love. It is, unlike our own so-called living, not for him self-expression or self-assertion or self-enhancement that gets him up in the morning, but the flourishing of the other.

Behold the man whose death is offered, even to us, we who are complicit in the evil wrought upon him, even by our apathy and inaction to keep a false peace. Behold him, but not only. We are invited to so much more. Kiss him also, and be fed by him at his table, his tomb; that his unquenchable life consumes your lust for death and mine. Behold him thus, and see the God who

saves us by suffering our worst and nevertheless,
well, that's a story for another day.