

“surely this one was innocent”



Soon after Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a wave of triumph, to shouts of hosannas and swaying palms, the mood shifts. A crowd that once cheered him on, now cries, “*Crucify him! Crucify him.*”

The crowd expected a “king.” They expected a “conqueror” and a “savior.” Prodded by echoes of Zechariah 9, which says, “*see, your ruler comes to you victorious and triumphant...*,” they expected the Messiah to fulfill their expectations. They anticipated an end to Roman occupation, the restoration of Israel and the promise of a victorious reign. But that was not Jesus’ way of establishing God’s reign of justice and peace.

One subtle “expectation” in many churches today is that every child who is baptized will grow up to lead a heteronormative life. When these expectations miscarry and a child later acknowledges an LGBTQ identity, the mood often shifts.

So what happens, then, in a world where expectations of God, the Catholic Church, each other, and the LGBTQ community clash? Perhaps a portion of the gospel proclaimed today on Palm Sunday offers some answers.

Luke 23: 1-49

1 Then the whole assembly arose and led Jesus to Pilate. **2** They began to accuse Jesus, saying, “We have found this one subverting our nation, opposing the payment of taxes to Caesar and even claiming to be Messiah, a king.”

3 So Pilate questioned Jesus, “Are you the King of the Jews?” “You have said so,” Jesus replied.

4 Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, “I find no basis for a charge against this man.” **5** But they insisted, “He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here to Jerusalem.”

6 On hearing this, Pilate asked Jesus if he was a Galilean **7** and learning that Jesus was under Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.

8 When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see Jesus. From what he had heard about Jesus, he hoped to see Jesus perform a miracle of some sort. **9** Herod plied Jesus with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer.

10 The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing Jesus. **11** Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing Jesus in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. **12** That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies.

13 Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, **14** and said to them, “You brought me this person as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. **15** Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. **16** Therefore, I will punish Jesus and then release him.” (**17** Pilate was obligated to release one prisoner to the people at festival time.) **18** But the whole crowd shouted, “Away with him! We want Barabbas!” **19** (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for starting a riot in the city, and for murder.)

20 Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. **21** But they kept shouting, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

22 For the third time Pilate spoke to them: “Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him flogged and then release him.”

23 But with loud shouts they demanded that Jesus be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. **24** So Pilate decided to grant their demand. **25** He released Barabbas who had been thrown into prison for rioting and murder, and handed Jesus over to the crowd.

The Crucifixion of Jesus

26 As the soldiers led Jesus away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. **27** A large number of people followed, including women who mourned and wailed for him. **28** Jesus turned and said to them, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. **29** For the time will come when you will say, ‘Blessed are the childless, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never

nursed!’ **30** Then people will say to the mountains, “Fall on us!” and to the hills, “Cover us up!” **31** For if people do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

32 Two others, both criminals, were also led out with Jesus to be executed. **33** When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified Jesus there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. **34** Jesus said, “Abba, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” Then they divided up his garments by casting lots for them.

35 The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.” **36** The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered Jesus sour wine **37** and said, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself.” **38** There was an inscription above Jesus that read, “This is the King of the Jews.”

39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at Jesus: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” **40** But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, **41** “We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this one has done nothing wrong.” **42** Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your glory.” **43** Jesus 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 until three in the afternoon, **45** for the sun stopped shining. Then the curtain in the sanctuary was torn in two. **46** Jesus uttered a loud cry and said, “Abba, into your hands I commit my spirit.” Saying this, Jesus breathed for the last time.

47 The centurion, seeing what had happened, glorified God and said, “Surely this one was innocent.” **48** When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. **49** But all those who knew Jesus, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

FOR REFLECTION

1. Do you find yourself confronted with hateful speech and/or anti-gay rhetoric often? How do you respond, especially if scripture is used to demonize you as a threat to children, traditional marriage, Christian community, civil society or public health?
2. Pilate questioned Jesus, “*Are you the King of the Jews?*” Jesus replied, “*You have said so.*” Are you able to own “who you are” as an LGBTQ person or ally? If not, how does it feel to be untrue to yourself? What would it mean to “come-out” and alter preconceived expectations of you?
3. “*For the third time Pilate spoke to them: “Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found no grounds for the death penalty.”* Have you or those

you know experienced violence, criminal proceedings, social ostracization, or death threats for an LGBTQ/ally identity? How has living with these fears affected you? Do you feel immobilized or motivated to cry out for justice?

4. "As the soldiers led Jesus away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus." As an ally, what has been your experience to carry such a "cross" for the LGBTQ community? Who or what made you feel you needed to share this "burden?" How has the LGBTQ community acknowledged and thanked you? As an LGBTQ person, have you helped carry the cross of others in the community?
5. "Abba, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Do you feel that this is an appropriate Lenten response for injustices done to the LGBTQ community? Why or why not?
6. "But this one has done nothing wrong." What would be a fitting redemption for any hurt caused you on account of your LGBTQ/ally identity? How do you envision "glory" or "paradise" that Jesus speaks of in verse 43?

PRAYER SONG

Change Our Hearts

*Change our hearts this time,
Your word says it can be
Change our minds this time
Your life could make us free.
We are the people your call set apart,
Lord, this time change our hearts.*

Brought by your hand to the edge of our dreams,
one foot in paradise, one in the waste;
drawn by your promises, still we are lured
by the shadows and the chains we leave behind.

Now as we watch you stretch out your hands,
offering abundances, fullness of joy.
Your milk and honey seem distant, unreal,
when we have bread and water in our hands.

Show us the way that leads to your side,
over the mountains and sands of the soul.
Be for us manna, water from the stone,
light which says we never walk alone.

[Song](#) by Rory Cooney

