

The Suffering Servant

Palm Sunday, Year B



In today's gospel, Jesus, by his silent fortitude, plays the role of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah (Isaiah 52:13-53:12). Desereted by his disciples, condemned by religious and secular authorities, Jesus dies quite alone with a cry of desolation. It is only after his death that the prayer he raised to Abba God in Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-36) receives an answer: the veil of the temple is torn and the centurion declares, "*Truly, this was God's Own.*"

Many LGBTQ people and allies lead lives of hushed fortitude. Their identities remain a secret, and stories of being deserted by family or condemned by religious and secular authorities are all too common. Prayers may feel like they go unanswered, and sadly, oftentimes, death is the only catalyst by which justice or recognition is accorded them.

In playing the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, though, Jesus fulfills scripture triumphantly and the Reign of God is initiated. In Romans 8:18, Saint Paul writes, "*What we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory that will be revealed to us.*" With such a joyful promise in store, how might we lift up our LGBTQ/ally lives this Holy Week and acclaim, "*Blessed is the coming reign of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest!*" (Mark 11:10)?

Mark 15: 1-39

As soon as it was daybreak the chief priests with the elders and the scribes, that is, the whole Sanhedrin held a council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. Pilate questioned him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus responded, "You say so." The chief priests accused Jesus of many things. Again Pilate questioned Jesus, "Have you no answer? See how many things they accuse you of." But to Pilate's astonishment, Jesus made no further response.

Now on the occasion of the feast Pilate used to release to them one prisoner whom they requested. A man called Barabbas was then in prison along with the rioters who had committed murder in an uprising. When the crowd came to ask that Pilate honor the custom, Pilate rejoined, "Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" Pilate knew that it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead. Pilate again asked them, "What am I to do with the one you call the King of the Jews?" The people shouted back, "Crucify him." Pilate said to them, "Why? What evil has he done?" They only shouted the louder, "Crucify him." So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas to them and, after he had Jesus scourged, handed him over to be crucified.

The soldiers led Jesus away inside the palace, that is, the praetorium, and assembled the whole cohort. They clothed Jesus in royal purple and, weaving a crown of thorns, placed it on him. They began to salute him with, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and kept striking Jesus on the head with a reed and spitting upon him. They knelt before him pretending to pay homage. And when they had finished mocking Jesus, they stripped him of the purple cloak, dressed him in his own clothes, and led him out to be crucified.

They pressed into service a passer-by, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry Jesus' cross. They brought Jesus to the site of Golgotha, which is translated Place of the Skull. They gave him wine drugged with myrrh, but Jesus did not take it. Then they crucified him and divided his garments by rolling dice for them to see what each should take. It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against Jesus read, "The King of the Jews." With Jesus they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left.

Those passing by reviled Jesus, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself by coming down from that cross." Likewise, the chief priests, with the scribes, mocked him among themselves and said, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the 'Messiah, the King of Israel,' come down now from the cross that we may see and believe in him!" Those who were crucified with him also kept abusing him.

At noon darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Some of the bystanders who heard it said, "Look, he is calling Elijah." One of them ran, soaked a sponge with wine, put it on a reed and gave it to Jesus to drink saying, "Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down."

Then Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. At that moment, the veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. When the centurion who stood guard over Jesus saw how he died, declared, "Truly this was God's Own!"

FOR REFLECTION

1. As an LGBTQ person/ally were you ever placed in a position where you had to defend yourself or the way you live your life? What were some of the accusations levied against you? How did you respond? What advice might you have for those still forced to keep their identity or way of life a secret? What do you think are the reasons why some may choose not to recognize you as "God's Own?"
2. In the Gospel, Jesus' trial runs through both religious and secular courts. How have you navigated your LGBTQ/ally identity in areas of Church and State. Where have you found sympathetic allies in each of them?
3. In wishing to "*satisfy the crowd*," Pilate displays his vacillating character. After having ordered Jesus' crucifixion, he also washes his hands off the responsibility of Jesus' death. Have you ever experienced a situation when your faith, fate, employment status, or safety was in peril because of weak and evasive leaders? How might you speak your truth to power?
4. The cast of characters who are allies to the Passion of the Christ are notably conspicuous in the Gospel of Mark (the woman with the jar of perfumed oil, Simon of Cyrene, and the "owner of the house" (where the Last Supper was held), amongst others). Who have been your greatest allies "*spreading their cloaks or leafy branches on the road*" for you? How have allies participated in your "*Passion*?"
5. "*At three, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*" What has been your prayer during the darkest times of your life as an LGBTQ person/ally? Where in scripture do you seek reassurance, comfort and affirmation?
6. *When the centurion who stood guard over Jesus saw how he died, declared, "Truly this was God's Own!"* Have people repented for any words or offenses against you? How have you forgiven them? If you are unable to forget the hurt or harm caused you, how might you find peace and healing?
7. How might you revisit your beliefs, principles or ideologies that may prevent you from participating fully in God's Reign? How can Holy Week be an examination of conscience for you?

PRAYER



Abba God, I thank you.
You have given me a well-trained tongue
so I might know how to speak to the weary
a word that will rouse them.

Morning after morning, Abba God,
you waken my ear so I may listen;
I have obeyed, I did not turn away.
I offered my back to those who beat me,
my cheeks to those who humiliated me.
I did not hide my face from insults or spitting.

Because you are my help, Abba God,
insults cannot wound me.
I have set my face like flint
knowing that I will not be put to shame.

– Based on *Isaiah 50: 4-7*