

A Reflection on Passover Day (Good Friday) 2021

Readings: John 18:1-19:42

Today is not a day for sermons, but a day to let the story speak for itself. So instead of a sermon, I have decided that we listen to the story again, and pick out some themes that we can use in living out our faith.

John begins his story with the betrayal and arrest of Jesus. Jesus would have trusted Judas when he accepted Judas to be one of the twelve. It is also possible that Judas demonstrated qualities of being a trust worthy person. But for reasons that no one knows for sure, Judas betrays his good friend. This evil is still so prevalent in our world. The perpetrators of violence against vulnerable people, especially against women and children, are those that the victims know and trust. Even Jesus was not spared.

The arrest of Jesus is so comical. He has nothing to defend or protect himself with, but Jewish leaders send a detachment of soldiers together with police to arrest him. What did they think they would be encountering? God's army of angels? Again, this is something that we still see around the world. Corrupt and insecure governments often react in so disproportional measures even to the smallest hint of dissatisfaction among the people.

After Jesus is arrested, he is brought before Caiaphas the High Priest that year. It is interesting that John makes the point that, Caiaphas sees Jesus as someone who can be sacrificed so the Romans would not destroy the Jews. So while Jesus' death is seen from God's perspective as for salvation of humanity, Caiaphas sees Jesus as a person he can sacrifice to save the Jews from the wrath of the Romans.

And while Jesus is with the Jewish authority, another sad scene occurs. Another close friend of Jesus, Peter, does something a good friend should not be doing to a friend. He says he does not know Jesus. It is difficult to say whether Judas' betrayal is worse or Peter's denial. Think about it. Your good friend has been arrested and you say you do not know him, fearful that you might be implicated? Well, that is exactly what Peter is doing. He is afraid that might get arrested also. Again, this still happens. We use friends and families when it is advantageous to us to do so.

After the Jewish authority have interrogated Jesus, they send him to Pilate, the Roman authority in Jerusalem. Some interesting interchanges occur between the two.

First, Pilate asks Jesus if he is the king of the Jews. But Jesus tells him that his kingdom is not of this world. We can imagine Pilate scratching his head, for he and Jesus are not talking about the same thing.

Further, Jesus tells Pilate that he has come to testify to the truth. Pilate is clearly lost. So he asks Jesus, 'What is the truth?' Interestingly, Pilate appears uninterested in Jesus' answer. He leaves Jesus and goes out and consult with the mob, who is baying for Jesus' blood.

In the end, Jesus' trial was a kangaroo court. It was farcical; despite saying he finds nothing against Jesus, he still sends Jesus to die. But, of course, we have been told over the years why Jesus' trial ended this way.

Now, there is something that is happening in the trial, whose values are not apparent, that I would like to share with you. It seems very trivial, but it is important in further affirming the truth that Jesus is the Christ of God, whose sacrifice frees us from the bondage of sin.

In John 1:29, Jesus is approaching John the Baptist and his disciples when John declares, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

For Jesus to satisfy John's declaration, Jesus had to die on the day of Passover, according to Messianic Rabbi Kirt Schneider. As I shared sometime in the past, events in Jesus' life have to be nuanced through the history of Israel.

The relevant Hebrew scriptures in understanding Jesus as the Lamb of God is the one on the very first Passover, where the Passover lamb was killed on Passover Day. So as the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world, Jesus had to die on Passover Day.

But we see in the interchange between the Jewish authority and Pilate that the Jews cannot kill anyone on the day of Passover. So in John's mind, without the Romans, the sacrifice for our forgiveness would not have happened.

The general consensus among scholars is that Jesus died at time the lambs of the Passover were being slaughtered.

God really works in ways so mysterious to us. The story of our salvation is so convoluted that it is not surprising that many just scratch their heads and say, it is foolishness; it's bizarre. Yet, we know it is true.

The message of today is very simple: 'our sins are forgiven'. That's it. So, rejoice and give thanks to God.

For the glory of God. Amen.