

Good Friday (25Mar16) Luke 22&23

Is this the will of God?

That seems to be today's essential—if hard and to some degree unanswerable—question. We could well declare that this story does not go how we want it to, so it has to raise the issue of willpower, of whether Jesus wanted this to happen. Did he know he was going to get himself killed? It almost fits with the parental critique, that rhetorical question for playing in the street, "Do you *want* to get run over?!" Jesus must've known he was poking the bear, provoking an overpowering reaction. So was it a suicide mission? A pyrrhic victory? Losing the battle to win the war, to misappropriate violent language? We may count this a tragedy of an innocent victim, but others saw Jesus as a threat.

More still: was it a divine purpose? Did *God* plan on or intend this? We heard Jesus' petition, "Not my will but yours be done," a dangerous prayer. Isaiah's poem of the Suffering Servant is also often paired with this day, in part declaring, "It was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain" (53:10).

Yet if we want to claim this was against the will of God, that God is anti-death, then we have to understand that means God didn't get God's way. Pontius Pilate got his way. Today, it would seem his will was more powerful than God's. The Roman Empire and their violent version of peace, through oppression and extortion—or bread and circuses—were, at best, diversions distracting from the larger freedom and wellbeing of the reign of God. Or perhaps we place blame with the selfish religious authorities

getting what they wanted, getting rid of the Messiah figure, the popular hero. In today's terminology, yet another triumph for the 1%.

That also confronts with us these other passion stories (of Gandhi, Oscar Romero, MLK, Berta Cáceres, Stormi, Bree Newsome, and Larycia Hawkins). If it's not God's will for such modern saints to die, to be mocked, to be sacrificed, then what? We need better than an inspiring educational moment of Jesus showing us to give it our all, to love with everything we've got, to stand up for what we believe in to the last. We can never fully say that a death is "worth it," so Jesus and these others must be more than martyred for the cause. We need the arc of history to bend better. It's not enough to say that God stands on our side and can be encouraged in following what we've discerned to be the will of God.

And what about undeserved death and senseless suffering that isn't trying to unmask injustice? What about Brussels or Syria? What about mothers who mourn? What about the poem's dead whales and native trees and emaciated people and all the bodies of this world? Or what about Lynne Schultz in the hospital this week, who said Holy Week has more meaning because of her struggles there, wondering if God had forsaken her. What does this will of God mean for those who have been hurting and excluded or facing death if this isn't directly addressing the problem to redeem the situation? What about relationships that fall apart? What when we're simply trying to live our lives how we think we ought and it doesn't go right? Why are things this way? Why death? Why losses? Why victims? Why

persistent injustice? Why not salvation? Why aren't things better? Why do we still have so much hard work in front of us, so much to lament? Where is God in all of this? Is God silent?

If so, maybe this is the most foolish of times to open my mouth, that the time to speak is Sunday, when our lips are loosed for Alleluias and we get the come-from-behind victory. Yet today, God, too, weeps. God grieves. Too much does not go how God wants it to.

"Father, forgive them"—as if fraudly, immoral incompetence were excusable and, in the end, redeemable.

"Don't weep for me; weep for yourselves"—as if we'd prefer not even to try engaging these difficult times, would wish to avoid it all and just save ourselves.

And, finally, "your will be done"—a dangerous prayer, because the will of God may lead us to confront death and all its agents, and that will lead us out of death into life.

Too much is sin. Too much is hatred. Too much interrupts God's striving for justice, for wellbeing, for life. In addressing it, our God dies.

With all that, it is not just silence, but also a day of hard words, especially from Jesus: