

Mark 11:1 - 11

Isaiah 50:4 - 9a

Psalms 31

Philippians 2:5 - 11

Mark 14:1 - 15:39

The Passion Narrative is complete in itself and hardly needs further comment. We hear it. We are moved by it. It asks us a question. How will we take it into our lives?

A few years ago the film *the Passion of the Christ* gave us an overwhelming picture of the extreme pain and cruelty of the passion. Many people's response was very personal. They saw Jesus doing something for them. It touched their unworthiness. It inspired them to try harder. But to stop there is to sell the passion short. There was something missing. There was no account of what was going on. How is it that that an innocent man was treated so appallingly? How is it that innocent people are still being treated so appallingly? Maybe the message is that somehow God was using Jesus in this way to do something for us? That Jesus was a willing agent going down a pre-ordained track for our benefit. If so it what sort of God is this and who are we if we accept it? Maybe we should look more deeply.

A Guatemalan artist suggests a different understanding. He painted a picture of the Last Supper against the political landscape of Latin America. He sets it in a smoke filled room. Around Jesus and the disciples are military generals cavorting with high class prostitutes, wealthy landowners making payoffs, guerrillas whispering so no-one would hear, a priest saying mass, land reform organisers attacked by vigilantes, mutilated bodies under the table. It's a long way from the rarefied spirituality of our Holy Week. It places the passion Jesus in the midst of the passions, intrigues and suffering of life as it really is. It wouldn't be difficult to translate into our world of climate change denial, lack of political nerve, dugs and alcohol, feral bankers, and whole families living in one room in rooming houses. The passion narrative becomes the story of the final hours of a fugitive community crumbling in face of state power. It is the story of one who challenged the powerful because he believed that another world is possible and who is dealt with all the ruthlessness and cruelty of powers who feel threatened.

This is a story we know well. It goes on and on. We may have experienced in milder forms ourselves. The real world does not like people who challenge it and point to a different way, particularly if they have a following. In the garden of Gethsemane Jesus undergoes a deep inner struggle as he faces the awful consequences of that challenge. He asked as we ask: Is this the way? Must I go down this awful track? Is it a waste or a ghastly mistake? Can this be the way to God?

Jesus goes into the darkness which humanity has made for itself. He takes that darkness into himself. A visitor to the ruins of Hiroshima soon after the end of the war saw on a wall just the outline of a human person, all that was left when a living body was incinerated. It came to him that this outline was Jesus. Jesus was there when the bomb exploded. Jesus on the cross bears in himself the horror of what human beings do to human beings in Hiroshima, in Nagasaki, in Rwanda, in Darfur, in E Timor, in Iraq, in Gaza and throughout history. He does not fight violence with violence but embraces the suffering which violence brings. He trusts in the life of God. This is God's answer to human darkness because God loves the world. Jesus would not have been sure. He trusted that somehow this way was Gods' way.

This trust is picked up by our first reading from the prophet Isaiah: *As I wake up each new day, God makes me hungry for learning. I learned eagerly; I never rebelled or quit. I was opposed by others, but I gritted my teeth and stood my ground. I looked them in the eye when they insulted me and spat in my face. I took it on the chin and did not fight back, when they gave me a belting and tore out my hair. The Lord GOD is always there for me, so no disgrace ever gets to me. I have steeled my jaw and dug in my heels, and I'm sure I'll never be ashamed of my stand because I can trust God to back me up.* The challenge to us is: where will we be in the story? Will we run away or will we trust that the road into the darkness becomes the road to life without limit?
