

**Song of Songs 5:2-8**  
**Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9**

**The holy, and broken, Hallelujah**

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### **ForeWord**

Every love song is on its way to becoming a psalm.

The biblical Psalms are songs of longing and devotion and celebration. They express the richness of love, the incompleteness of love, the longing for love. This is, of course, a love for God, seeking God's own love, but it doesn't take much tweaking to turn a modern love song with its laments and lustings and celebrations into psalm material.

What the Psalms grasp after, what every love song seeks, we might call the Hallelujah. "Hallelujah" is the cry which rejoices in the arrival of the miracle. The Hallelujah is about life out of death, the lost now found, love consummated. The whole of the biblical story, Psalms and all, is oriented toward this "Hallelujah".

Our readings today speak of longing, of suffering, and of the Hallelujah. Two of our texts are scriptural. One comes from the Song of Songs, which is not quite psalmic but the woman who speaks here could be us in our longing for God, or God in God's longing for us (and copping a beating instead). From the letter to the Hebrews, we hear of God's co-suffering with us in Christ, and in Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah" we hear what has become something of a secular hymn of lament and celebration.

Let us listen for God's word in our hearing of these texts...

### **Word: The Testimony of Scripture**

(→ Songs 5. 2-8; "Hallelujah", Leonard Cohen; Hebrews 4. 14-16; 5. 7-9)

### **Word: Proclamation**

If the longing for life and love is the longing for a Hallelujah, when it comes to the events we gather to mark today and the next few days, where is the Hallelujah to be spoken, shouted or sung? Where, in what we recall in this season, is the miracle? What elicits the Hallelujah?

Where we think the miracle is depends on what we think the problem is that needs to be overcome. And it's difficult, given what we usually think miracles to be, not to imagine that Easter's miracle is the Resurrection. Is this not the Hallelujah moment? "Christ the Lord is risen today, Hallelujah!", we sing. So the hymns go, and properly so, rightly understood.

Compared to the proclaimed Resurrection, Good Friday's crucifixion seems depressingly mundane, played out again and again in a million different ways ever since, and still now. Good Friday is the psalmist's pained cry, and the abandonment and beating of the lover in what we heard from the Songs, and Christ's own experience as sufferer. To find the Hallelujah in the Easter Resurrection is to imagine that the problem to be overcome is the death of Jesus, and this as somehow symbol and inclusive of our own death. Good Friday seems to be the psalmist's lament, the lover's agony in separation, and Easter seems to be the ecstasy of love's consummation.

On this reading, the cross is the question to which the Resurrection is an answer as love's "victory march" to the jubilant Hallelujah. This resonates, of course, with our strong desire to be somewhere else, with our feeling that, in one form or another, and wherever we happen to find ourselves, there's too much death here. In circumstances like this, "Christ is risen" feels like code for the "out" we desperately want.

And yet.

And yet, to see Jesus only as victim is to make him too much like us in our experience of being victims of this or that heavy oppression. Indeed, Jesus suffered as we have, as we heard from the letter to the Hebrews this morning. But this is, paradoxically, a *miraculous* suffering. And it is miraculous in the same way as the miracle of the Resurrection is miraculous: in both cases, the power of death over us is denied. Jesus dies, of course, and in that sense, death holds sway; Jesus is *mortal*. But his willingness to die, his refusal to deny the claim on him by the God who sent him, the refusal to fear death more than he fears that God – this is the death of death and hell's destruction. Jesus' refusal to deny the truth of God's claim upon his life is the declaration that death shall have no dominion over him, *even though he dies*. The miracle of Good Friday is Jesus' refusal to negotiate with death, to engage in death's economy, on death's own terms.

And whatever the Resurrection of Easter Day is, it doesn't exceed this Good Friday miracle. This means that Good Friday and Easter are not one thing followed by another, as a question is followed by an answer. Good Friday and Easter are parts of the same thing or, better, they *are* the same thing done twice, done differently. The Resurrection is no reward for dying, no reversal of death. The Resurrection is rather a repeat, a recapitulation, a *summarising* of the cross. Easter asks, "Did you see that? Did you see what Jesus just did?", and Easter affirms, "He just overcame death; he just triumphed over the power death has over you." Easter does this, too, of course, and this is the point: Good Friday and Easter Day do the *same* thing: they both signal the overpowering of death, the end of death's dominion, the end of death's determination of us. The divine achievement in the Resurrection does not supersede or outshine the human achievement on the cross. They, rather, coincide.

But now, of course, the tone of the Hallelujah changes. The Hallelujah is not merely Easter's major lift, because it needs to capture the minor key – Friday's cold and broken Hallelujah. What other kind of Hallelujah could it be? But the point is that it is still a Hallelujah. It doesn't matter which we hear, the holy or the broken; "Hallelujah" it is, and remains.

The fractured love of Good Friday, the cost of refusing to yield to weaponised death, and the passion, the sin and the guilt this reveals – this all asks of us a holy, if broken, Hallelujah. Holy, because it is everything that needs to be said; broken, because we don't quite know how to say it, or to live it. We hanker for the warm and bright Hallelujah of a God ahead of us in Resurrection, rather than the colder and darker Hallelujah of a God with us in crucifixion.

But if we declare, as will be sung later, that we know that our redeemer lives, the "where" of this life is as much on the cross as in the resurrection appearances and wherever "heaven" might be. This hard but liberating word of Good Friday is where Cohen ends up in his almost-a-psalm:

*...even though it all went wrong  
we'll stand before the Lord of Song  
with nothing on our tongue but Hallelujah.*

To live and move and have our being with a crucified God is not to be waiting for a happy ending. It is to be holy, if broken, here and now.

This is good, and so this Friday we call Good: Christ, the Lord, is crucified today.  
Hallelujah.

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