



SIXTH SUNDAY OF LENT PASSION SUNDAY 21/00 RSJ

Isaiah 50: 4-7 Philippians 2: 6-11 Mark 14-15:47

Today we have the reading of the Passion according to Mark.

Mark's narrative is stark, dark and filled with threat. The story can be divided into four acts, each containing several scenes.

Because of the constraints of space I can only touch briefly on the story. Follow the Gospel with Jesus, note particularly who appears and what role they play.

The first act is a Prologue to the drama.

It begins and ends with plotting. Between the plotting of the priests and scribes and the darkness of Judas' decision comes a splash of light. A woman anoints Jesus' head. This is a gesture reminiscent of the anointing of Kings. The woman proclaims her recognition of the Messiah.

The second act is about the Meal.

It begins, "On the first day of Unleavened Bread," that is the day of the death of the paschal lambs, Jesus prepares for his Supper. The joy of this occasion is clouded by the presence of the spirit of fear that will lead to several betrayals. In broken bread shared with his friends and in a common cup, Jesus signifies his gift of himself and calls his friends to live like him, in a life poured out for others.

With each act we are moved deeper and deeper into the passion.

This act begins with Jesus saying that the group will not hold together after he is gone, and Peter proclaiming that against the betrayal of all, he will be constant. In the prayer of the garden, the space between Jesus and his friends widens and the mob moves in to claim their prey.

A naked man fleeing the scene symbolises the spiritual poverty of the disciples. At a makeshift trial, conducted under cover of darkness the religious leaders take their revenge. In the humiliation that follows, only Jesus retains his dignity. The curtain comes down as Peter, challenged to own his acquaintance of Jesus, not before a court but in the courtyard, denies any knowledge of the man.

We move now into the final act.

Jesus enters the stage dominated by Roman law.

Pilate is not impressed with the charges laid against Jesus, but he is aware of the danger that can come from the volatile community that he must govern. As a sop to the people, he offered a way out, "Pick a prisoner, this is a time of celebration." Pilate miscalculated the climate and the background preparation. Barabbas, the son of the people, is chosen.

In a painful and ironic reference to the royal anointing by the woman at the beginning of the story, Jesus is crowned in mockery. As Jesus begins the final walk through the streets of the sacred city, a bystander is dragooned into carrying the cross. A man (whose sons would later belong to the community of the Way) is on his way home from work when he becomes Jesus' helper.

Darkness covers the last scenes. The mockery continues and Jesus suffers the pain of desolation. "Why?" The cry of death echoes the cry of birth. The Holy of Holies, once hidden by a curtain is now exposed. God is accessible to his people. A foreigner, echoes the voice of God at Jesus' baptism, "Clearly this man was the Son of God."

The story ends with an Epilogue. There are women present, they have always been present. They have been attending to Jesus' needs from the beginning. Out of the shadows comes Joseph, who uses his authority to claim the body of the one in whom he'd placed his hope. The women observe and learn of the location of the grave. They will be back at first light to continue their ministrations.

Where am I in this story?

Patricia Stevenson rsj.