

Let This Cup Pass

Mark 14:32-42 by Patty Friesen Palm Sunday, March 24/24

Every year we act out the crowds welcoming Jesus riding into Jerusalem for Passover with our own palm processional. The hopes for a renewal of society when God's Anointed One enters Zion and establishes true peace and justice shaped much of the prophecy and poetry of ancient Judaism. Today and throughout this Holy Week, Jesus clearly demonstrates that he is a different kind of leader, one that will establish his kingdom of peace on earth through self-sacrifice. Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane prepares us for the fact that he will not exercise his power to escape suffering.

Everything will happen as though Jesus were an ordinary human victim, but the disciples can't handle that. They bungle their way through the whole passion. Peter denies Jesus 3 times. James and John request the highest places of honour when Jesus comes into his kingdom (10:37) but Jesus' warns them that they will indeed "share the cup" that he is about to drink (10:39) but it won't be a cup of power and prestige. It will be a cup of suffering. Jesus reminds them that he came as a suffering servant to give his life "for many" (10:45).

At Gethsemane the three disciples Peter, James and John have the opportunity to participate in Jesus' "cup." Instead, despite their earlier boasting, they fall asleep and fail to watch with Jesus—not just once, but three times (vv. 37, 40, 41). This scene is a stunning portrayal of the failure of Jesus' most prominent disciples to understand his choice. And it is a choice – the Mount of Olives is on the way out of town on the way to Bethany. Jesus could have gotten out of Dodge and gone to Mary, Martha and Lazarus' house to escape. He had a choice but even though Jesus has chosen this path, he asks God to let this cup of suffering pass

from him. It is the most human of Jesus' prayers and one that we pray ourselves in the midst of our diagnoses and difficulties. Let this cup pass!

The picture of Jesus praying this lament, let this cup pass - evokes the laments of others in scripture – Job in his trials, Naomi in hers. Typical of laments, it includes abandonment by friends. But unlike many laments, which conclude with words of praise for God's deliverance, in this case both Jesus and Mark's readers know that God will not deliver Jesus by taking away the cup of suffering.

I want to linger in this moment of Jesus' lament for a bit. As Christians we've been taught to quickly move from Jesus' lament "Let This Cup Pass" to "If it be your will." We don't want to remain in his doubt and sorrow. We need him to be strong and ultimately obedient to God even in the face of death so we too can be strong and ultimately obedient to God even in the face of death. I find Jesus' lament "Let this cup pass" to be more real and more human and more honest and more reflective of my own struggles with cups of suffering. Jesus' cup of suffering may be divine necessity but I don't believe ours are.

Throughout Lent, our Hungering for Hope prayer group on Wednesday mornings, has been learning about the formation of the state of Israel that led to the current crisis in Gaza. We have been putting our hopes and prayers into a prayer bowl like the one on the altar. It is made by Eugene Penner from melted un-recyclable plastics that would otherwise go into the landfill. It has swirls of colours and no two bowls are the same. Some Sunday in May, we'll go see Eugene's workshop. This recycled plastic bowl has been a visual reminder for our Lenten prayers - that we are sometimes in meltdown. The meltdown of humanity is precisely where divine agency and healing can occur. Honestly facing the brokenness in our lives is a

precondition for healing as Karl spoke about last week in burn-out. If we can begin to share about our burn-out and cups of suffering, it allows others to share about theirs.

In Jewish mysticism, ten vessels originally carried God's light to the world. Too fragile to safely harbour God's light, the vessels shattered, leaving the world in chaos. Ever since then, God has been trying to put the pieces back together to hold God's light. This is reminiscent of Good Friday's shattering earthquake and chaos of storm clouds at the crucifixion. In the resurrection, God's work has been to melt us back together again to hold the light.

Apostle Paul describes this in 2 Corinthians 4:7-9, We have this treasure in clay jars, so that it might be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsake; struck down, but not destroyed. Paul also says that God's grace is made perfect in human weakness.

I gave up shame for Lent this year – shame being the debilitating feeling I have when I'm called out on something and feel my face turning red and my brain shutting down. Shame is deeper than guilt. Guilt tells me I've made a mistake. Shame takes it to the next level that somehow, I'm the mistake – that not only I'm not doing enough but I'm not good enough. Shame is a religious/cultural legacy we have in a perfectionist denomination where Menno Simons said the church of Christ must be without spot or wrinkle. Giving up shame for Lent made me more aware that I'm experiencing it a lot in and not only me. One Sunday I had 5 people apologize for something – forgetting a meeting or misspelling something in the bulletin or whatever – 5 in a row made me think that maybe we all experience shame a lot. The problem with my shame is that I quickly want to off-load it onto others. Patrick said I was hard

on him this Lent – I said I wasn't harder on him than any other time of year but having my shame triggers firing all Lent made me lean into him about our unshoveled walk and dirty cars. We in shame project it into blaming others. It's an important spiritual awareness and it's been the hardest thing I've had to try to give up in Lent.

Jewish singer Leonard Cohen describes our human imperfection while singing: Ring the bells that still can ring. Forget your perfect offering. There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in. (Anderson, *Prophets of Love*, p. 114) Leonard Cohen, though Jewish, said he was in love with Jesus. He was taken to church growing up by his Catholic nannies and found Jesus to be the perfect human being. In his song, *If it be your will* - he identifies with Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane.

If it be your will
That I speak no more
And my voice be still
As it was before
I will speak no more
I shall abide until
I am spoken for
If it be your will

If it be your will
That a voice be true
From this broken hill
I will sing to you
From this broken hill
All your praises they shall ring
If it be your will

If it be your will
If there is a choice
Let the rivers fill
Let the hills rejoice
Let your mercy spill
On all these burning hearts

If it be your will
To make us well
And to draw us near
And bind us tight
All your children here
In our rags of light
All dressed to kill
And end this night
If it be your will
If it be your will

Mystic Jewish vessels, Paul's clay jars, Cohen's crack in everything, Jesus' broken hill, all exist within a long and rich scripture tradition that has always found hope not despite, but within, human frailty as personified in the weakness, suffering and death of Christ. In today's scripture, Passover brings out both the hungering for hope and the tensions within the Jewish people. Expectations that are raised cannot help leading to disappointment.

Conscious of his impending death on the cross, Jesus knows that crowds swing from expectation to disappointment. The joyful expectations for God's salvation that attend his approach to the city will leave him abandoned on the cross. This story reminds us that faith is not built on such cycles of hope and disappointment. Jesus knows the patient suffering and apparent lack of success required for the coming of God's rule. The power of God, which the crowd hopes to witness, will be demonstrated, but it will occur only on the cross. In this incredible choice of Christ's - we are accompanied in our cups of suffering.

A poem for Good Friday called Re-imagine by Bonnie Thurston (CC, Feb. 24) I will close with it as a prayer. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. Revelation 21:1

The world has become
a sad and sordid place
full of absence, longing
for what might have been.

We are scattered, shattered,
broken as bone china cups
dropped on a tile floor.
I shake accusatory fingers
at the formless void,

from somewhere out
beyond imagining
hear a terrible Eloquence:
“What have you done
with what I gave you?

You made the pieces.
Now pick them up,
re-imagine them as
fragments of possibility.
Fit them together anew.
Re-create my image
in your damaged hearts.”
Amen.