

**Primary Readings:** Isaiah 53:1-12; Hebrews 10:15-25; John 18:1-19:42

This is not at all what we had in mind. Just a few days ago, we found ourselves in the crowds shouting, “Hosanna! Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the One who comes in the Name of the Living God! Hosanna!” Hosanna, which means, “save us.” When we asked to be saved, to be delivered, to be rescued – this is not at all what we had in mind.

We wanted our Messiah to save us with a *mighty army* – and maybe we were ready to fight, even to die in that army...When we asked to be saved, to be delivered, to be rescued – *this is not what we had in mind*... our leader, our Messiah, our God... nailed to a tree, struggling for each breath, calling with that God-forsaken voice, ‘I’m thirsty.’ No, this is not what we had in mind at all when we cried, ‘Hosanna – Save Us!’ this is not what we had in mind at all... Next time, we might be more careful what we ask for.

The irony of it all – the mockery – rolls in like fog, as we listen to soldier’s bickering over who will get their gambling prize – the clothes of an innocent man being crucified. The irony – the biting lack of pity – is heavy, almost too heavy to breathe, as religious leaders argue over proper grammar – “Shall we write on the sign ‘Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Judeans’ or shouldn’t it be ‘This man *SAID*, I am the King of the Judeans’ ...”

And as we try to get the irony, bitter as a sponge full of wine on the tip of a tongue, we ask ourselves, What kind of a King is this? And what God would allow this? And how could it be that this Messiah would save us? **This is certainly not the king that we cheered for – this king doesn’t seem to be accomplishing anything. *This is not the God that we want to worship – this God is too painful to watch.*** No, this is not the Messiah that we had in mind... Not at all.

And maybe as we travel home this evening, trying to put the cross far behind us, put it in a corner of our mind where we don’t have to think about it – perhaps, just as the disciples did, as Mary Magdalene and Mary the wife of Clopas, and Jesus’ mother, and her sister, and the disciple ‘whom Jesus

loved...’ had the image of Jesus hanging on the cross seared into their memory... Maybe as we travel home this dark evening, to avoid that image, we remember the words of Isaiah and of Hebrews – they bounce back and forth in our thoughts.

We hear the author of Hebrews say that Jesus is like a great priest over the house of God – and the author uses language that reminds us of a “Sacrificial System” – a system where a person brings before God a sacrifice, like a Lamb, and there on the altar the sacrifice is given in order to please God. But we look at Jesus hanging on the cross and we have to ask, “What kind of a sacrifice is this? How could *this* be acceptable to God? This isn’t what we had in mind at all...”

And the author of Hebrews says, “Yes, that’s right – it ISN’T what you had in mind at all. If it were up to you, you would continue to worship with sacrifice – you would come before the altar and as long as you followed rules and regulations and the gift that you brought was without blemish, then you would be in God’s favor...”

“But this isn’t what GOD has in mind at all! Because God is merciful and abounding in steadfast love, THIS is what God has in mind: God will turn our ‘system of sacrifices’ upside down and inside out and hang it on a cross. And replace your sacrifices with sacraments.”

Because with a sacrifice, we do the work in order to please God – but with and in and through a sacrament, God gifts us with grace and mercy and abundance through earthly vessels – like water and wine and bread and flesh and skin and blood and body.

And while with SACRIFICES we tremble in fear before an ALTAR – with SACRAMENTS we gather around a bathtub to be washed... we gather around a table to be fed and nourished.

And we will look up at the cross, and see – at that final moment of death – spilling out of the side of Jesus, blood and water: essentials of life, given – broken – shed – for you and for me. And we hear the words ringing through our heads, “this is my body, broken for you.”

This isn’t what we had in mind, this isn’t what we expected at all...

And the author of Isaiah says, “Yes, that’s right – this ISN’T what you expected. If it were up to you, the Messiah would come as the leaders of this world come – with armies, with weapons of mass destruction, with machines that kill, and with a cycle of violence that will only beget more and more violence.”

The prophetic voice of Isaiah asks us, “Aren’t you TIRED of the violence – of the war – of the needless loss of life? No, this isn’t what GOD has in mind at all... *Because* God is merciful and abounding in steadfast love, THIS is what God has in mind: God turns our ‘systems and machines of WAR’ & our ‘cycles of violence’ upside down and inside out and hangs them on a cross. And replaces violence with a *SUFFERING SERVANT THAT GIFTS US WITH A* ‘system of SHALOM.’ And it grinds the wheels of violence to a halt.”

No, Isaiah tells us that this Messiah isn’t what we expected at all. This Messiah – THIS LEADER, THIS KING – SUFFERS ON BEHALF OF THE PEOPLE. This Messiah is so full of love and mercy and compassion, that the ways of forgiveness are wedged into the wheels of violence to grind them into peace and justice – into Shalom. And we look up at Jesus and hear those words, “It is finished” – “It is fulfilled.” And “In this way,” God says, “I bring satisfaction to a world that wasn’t expecting it, I bring fulfillment to a world that isn’t going to understand it, I bring shalom to a world that knows only violence.”

Still, when we see the image of the cross – of Jesus hanging there at The Place of The Skull, which is called Golgotha... we say to ourselves, ‘This is not what we had in mind...’ And God speaks a word to our deepest soul in the midst of our despair, ‘This is not what I had in mind either... But this is what has come... And I am finding and will find and have found a way to break into this world of death, of violence, of sacrifice... I am working to bring about something... New. Just wait.’

And so we wait. Caught in the midst of the mystery of these three holiest days, on a day that we dare to call “Good” only hundreds of years later. And so we wait with empty minds. Not at all knowing what to expect.