

Holy Week 2020: Good Friday

10.04.2020
By Pat Bennett

Introduction

An overall introduction to Holy Week 2020 readings

One of our general principles in producing the weekly reflections for the Spirituality of Conflict project has been to avoid tying these too tightly to events current at the time of writing. However as we reach Holy Week 2020, we find ourselves in a world which has been radically altered: the Covid19 pandemic and its ongoing consequences have, for many folk – especially those of us in more privileged circumstances – reshaped our daily experiences, reframed our cherished narratives, and redrawn our tried and tested maps for navigating life. It seems wrong then to blithely write as though this were a Holy Week 'like any other'; and indeed now, more than ever, we need the wisdom embedded in the multi-levelled and richly textured narratives of the Gospels to challenge, comfort and guide us.

One consequence of the restrictions to movement and contact has been to call our attention to things which often go unheeded – such as the physical, mental and emotional spaces we inhabit, or to things that we take for granted such as human touch and interaction; this has in turn given me a different attentive focus when reading these familiar passages. Hence in these reflections I will be looking at the different types of *spaces* – intense, contested, questioning, unsettling, profound and paradoxical, relational, courageous, disrupted, and enlightened – which the various characters occupy, and at how attention to these can help us to deepen our understanding of conflict and our responses to it. Thus whilst not referring directly to the pandemic, these reflections have nevertheless been influenced by it; you might also choose to use them as a way of reflecting on the particular conflicts which it has exposed or heightened, and of your own responses – of both complicity and resistance – to these, addressing what needs to be amended, celebrated or strengthened. This too seems a very appropriate way of journeying with Christ through Holy Week towards Easter and beyond.

Good Friday: Relational Space

The reading set for today, covering as it does a lengthy span of time and a multitude of different scenes, confronts us with participants in a range of emotional, mental, and physical spaces, and it is impossible to do justice to all of these. So I will begin by simply delineating some of them before turning attention to one in particular – a relational space holding a moment of profound presence.

Preparation

Take a large sheet of blank paper and, working through the passage, list all the different types of spaces which people occupy. You might want to also try and group them into different types e.g. physical/mental/emotional, or active/passive, or by the people involved etc – use whatever taxonomy makes most sense to you. If there are particular spaces which draw your attention, make a note of this for later.

Text

John 18:1–19:42

After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered.

Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples.

So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons.

Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, “Whom are you looking for?”

They answered, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus replied, “I am he.” Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them.

When Jesus said to them, “I am he,” they stepped back and fell to the ground.

Again he asked them, “Whom are you looking for?” And they said, “Jesus of Nazareth.”

Jesus answered, “I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go.”

This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, “I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me.”

Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest’s slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave’s name was Malchus.

Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup

that the Father has given me?"

So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him.

First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year.

Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people.

Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest,

but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in.

The woman said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not."

Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing around it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.

Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching.

Jesus answered, "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret.

Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said."

When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?"

Jesus answered, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?"

Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, "You are not also one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not."

One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?"

Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover.

So Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?"

They answered, "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you."

Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law." The Jews replied, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death."

(This was to fulfill what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?"

Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?"

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here."

Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

Pilate asked him, "What is truth?" After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, "I find no case against him."

But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?"

They shouted in reply, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a bandit.

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged.

And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe.

They kept coming up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and striking him on the face.

Pilate went out again and said to them, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him."

So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!"

When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him."

The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God."

Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever.

He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer.

Pilate therefore said to him, "Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?"

Jesus answered him, "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin."

From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor."

When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha.

Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, "Here is your King!"

They cried out, "Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!" Pilate asked them,

“Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but the emperor.”

Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus;

and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha.

There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them.

Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.”

Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek.

Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’”

Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.”

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top.

So they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.” This was to fulfill what the scripture says, “They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.”

And that is what the soldiers did. Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.”

Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), “I am thirsty.”

A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth.

When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed.

Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him.

But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.

Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out.

(He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.)

These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, "None of his bones shall be broken."

And again another passage of scripture says, "They will look on the one whom they have pierced."

After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body.

Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds.

They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews.

Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid.

And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

This lengthy Gospel reading takes us from the Last Supper to the tomb by way of betrayal, violence, religious trial, denial, political trial, mockery, crucifixion, callous indifference, tender concern, death, bravery and reverence. In the course of this journey we pass through or by many different spaces inhabited by the characters we encounter. There are spaces marked or dominated by violence (e.g. Gethsemane, Pilate's courtyard, Golgotha); spaces in which people are trapped – either by their own intentions/actions or by those of others (e.g. Judas, Annas, Caiaphas, Peter, Pilate); spaces dominated by competing narratives (the courtyard of Pilate's headquarters – on several different occasions); spaces shaped by religious or political fear (the trial scenes); spaces revealing ordinary human needs and fears (Peter in the garden and the courtyard); places of callous indifference – or maybe simply self-protection (the soldiers at various points); places revealing profound relational generosity (as Jesus is dying); places full of grief and endurance (the three Marys and John); places requiring courage (Jesus throughout, and Nicodemus and Joseph – who we will consider in tomorrow's reflection).

Any of these might furnish us with useful tools for reflecting on the different dynamics and effects of conflict. However the one I want to give attention to today is the one which happens in verses 26 and 27:

'When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.'

In a profound and deeply moving way this moment is perhaps the ultimate paradigmatic example of what we were considering yesterday: Jesus, in the most agonising way possible is experiencing the confines imposed by temporality and mortality; his divinity is no protection against the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual noise to which he is being subjected in these last moments of his earthly life. Yet despite this ultimate experience of restriction, this maximum compression of his own space, Jesus reaches out to open up a beautiful, tender, space of compassion and connection through which to provide immediate (and ongoing) shelter for the person within whom he himself had his first – and most life-giving – experience of confinement.

Jesus is, in this instant, fully present with his mother – just as he will also be fully present when he speaks with the dying thief in Luke's account of the scene (Luke 23: 42-43; for a reflection on this interaction see [Proper 29 from year C](#)). He not only recognises and responds to her immediate relational needs, he also takes steps to affirm the importance of these and to make future provision for them to be met when he can no longer do so himself. Thus right to the end, Jesus remains faithfully available to those around him. In this ultimate instance it requires that he somehow muffle and restrain the clamour of his own *extremis* in order to still preserve a space in which the Other can be held, connected with and sheltered. It is almost inconceivable to us that this is possible, and yet Jesus does it not once, but twice – not because his divinity gives him superhuman power, but because his whole life has been lived out of this narrative centre of hospitality towards, and care for, the other – the ultimate example of the *disponibilité* and *creative fidelity* of which the philosopher Gabriel Marcel writes so powerfully*

It is difficult to say anything in the face of this most profound moment, other than to reiterate that attention to the life of Jesus will show us how to occupy the spaces of our own lives – even in the midst of conflict – in ways which reflect the love, generosity, and compassionate care which are the hallmarks of Kingdom life.

Simply sit with this moment and let it lead you into prayer.

Later in the day, if time permits, you might want to visit some of the spaces or groups of spaces which you identified in the preparation or which are indicated in the reflection and use these as lenses through which to reflect on your own experiences and understandings of conflict.

Prayer

Jesus,

Sometimes

there

simply

are

no

words ...