Holy Week:  Day 6 Good Friday Jesus is arrested, tried, and executed

We can read the story of Good Friday a number of times and still it challenges the human

heart. Like a heavy weight it bears down on our shoulders reminding us that humankind has

to carry corporate guilt for murdering God. Yet He made himself vulnerable to reveal the

depths of his powerful love, so no one need fear death or carry their burdens forever.

Even though you know what happened read the story again and immerse yourself in the

imagery, symbolism, power, depth, and emotion.

The events of this terrible day started the previous evening in an olive garden called

Gethsemane, the name in Aramaic meaning ‘oil press’. Note that the Son of Man in the

last hours of his life should go to pray in a place called ‘oil press’ having taught that “I am

the true vine…”.  Mark tells us in the original Greek that Jesus is literally surrounded by

sorrow, grief, pain and agony, and that his sorrow came upon him suddenly with surprising

shock and inner pain.  This experience, and knowing what he was about to face during the

coming hours, he asked his Father if the cup could be passed from him.

Then Judas comes and betrays the Son of Man with a kiss.  A kiss is a sign of affection,

especially of love; but an insincere kiss is a sign of a traitor. This is clearly an indication of

what was to come from other people too, and Jesus obviously knew about human frailty

and what was in Judas’s heart

Reflection:  Do I try to fool Jesus?  Do I tell him I love him, mouthing the words with a cold

heart?  Do I kiss him like Judas?

Prayer: I don’t want to fool you, Lord.  You see all, you know all.  You know my innermost

thoughts and feelings.  You know my heart better than I know it myself.  Change me I pray.

Jesus is taken to the Jewish religious leaders and they put him on trial.  In essence they fear

him and his threat to their positions of power and influence, (people still do) but they can’t

make their stories match up, providing witnesses with both conflicting and false statements.

  Jesus remains silent the whole time knowing that any answer he makes will be turned

against him due to their mind-set and ultimate purpose.  Finally (according to Matthew and

Mark) after being silent throughout the whole trial, Jesus says just one thing: the answer to

the question that would ultimately damn him to death in their eyes: “Are you the Christ, the

Son of the Blessed One?” – “I am”, says Jesus “And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the

right hand of the Mighty One …” The title ‘Son of Man’ implies he is a servant to everyone.

 The Jews did not have the authority to impose the death penalty, so early the next day Jesus

is taken to Pilate where again he is mainly silent. Matthew records that Jesus says just one

thing, to the question from Pilate Are you the king of the Jews?  Yes, it is as you say.

 Pilate is sometimes portrayed as a weak and ineffectual governor because the story can

interpret him as being indecisive, but this is not accurate. Palestine was a problematical area

within the Roman Empire with a mix of people and troublesome factions and any appointed

governor had to be decisive in order to keep the peace. He must have been a wily politician

too, knowing the people as well as his responsibilities to Rome. Like anyone faced with such

a difficult problem where any decision can cause a riot, Pilate looks for a way out and offers

the people a choice; if it goes wrong then it won’t be on his shoulders. Jesus has obviously

not committed any crime under Roman law, so Pilate takes advantage of a custom they

have:

It was the custom at the Feast to release a prisoner whom the people requested.

A man called Barabbas was in prison...[he] had committed murder....

The response to Pilate’s offer is unexpected; the crowd choose Barabbas. (The cross is

foreshadowed: the innocent one pays for the guilty.) Pilate knew the mind-set of the Jewish

leaders and their envy of Jesus, so he questions the crowd three times, but their choice is

clear – they want Jesus executed! The Politician then washes his hands of their decision and

Jesus the innocent one will be killed.

 Jesus is taken away by the soldiers and scourged.  This is worse than just whipping because

the leather strips of the whip include sharp metal and bone causing skin to be stripped from

a body. A crown of thorns is placed on Jesus’ head, he’s mocked and spat upon before

being led out into the world. Through the busy streets of Jerusalem Jesus carries his cross

accompanied by the crowd’s jeers and taunts, to the Place of the Skull where he is nailed to

the cross.

Jesus says just seven things while hanging there:

Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.

He offers forgiveness.

I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.

He offers heaven.

Dear woman, here is your son. Son, here is your mother.

He is still concerned for others.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

He feels abandoned.

I am thirsty.

He is suffering in a desert.

Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

He still has faith in his Father.

It is finished.

The Greek word is more like “It is accomplished!” - I’ve done it!

It is over. (Or so it seems)

Still falls the rain

Still falls the Rain--

Dark as the world of man, black as our loss--...

Still falls the Rain

With a sound like the pulse of the heart that is changed to the hammer-beat...

Still falls the Rain

In the Field of Blood where the small hopes breed and the human brain

Nurtures its greed...

Still falls the Rain

At the feet of the Starved Man hung upon the Cross...

Under the Rain the sore and the gold are as one.

Still falls the Rain--

Still falls the Blood from the Starved Man’s wounded Side:

He bears in His Heart all wounds,--those of the light that died,

The last faint spark

In the self-murdered heart, the wounds of the sad uncomprehending dark,...

Still falls the Rain--...

See, see where Christ’s blood streams in the firmament:

It flows from the Brow we nailed upon the tree

Deep to the dying, to the thirsting heart

That holds the fires of the world,--dark-smirched with pain...

Then sounds the voice of the One who like the heart of man

Was once a child who among beasts has lain--

Still do I love, still shed my innocent light, my Blood, for thee.

(from Still Falls the Rain by Dame Edith Sitwell)

Try spending a good portion of the day in silence: in contemplation of a dark but truly Good

Friday, and an unjustly murdered Jesus.

Digging Deeper

You can find accounts of Jesus&#39; last day in all of the gospels:

Matthew 26:36-27:61

Mark 14:32-15:47

Luke 22:39-23:56

John 18:119:42