

Year C Passion Sunday

The hour has come. This is how we begin today's Gospel story. Knowing what lies ahead, Jesus remains resolutely on the path and takes his seat at the table. The hour has come...and we are suddenly moving very quickly toward the cross. Jesus forms a new bond with us, in a covenant of bread and wine that is his body and blood, he gives us the kingdom so that we may eat and drink at his table in that kingdom. All the while, he knows that this promise will be accomplished through his death. The hour has come.

Luke gives us, today, our Messiah, making it perfectly clear that our Messiah is innocent – totally, completely, fully innocent. Pilate finds no guilt in him and sends him off to Herod. Herod finds no guilt in him and sends him back. Pilate, again, stresses Jesus' innocence. "I have not found this man guilty of any of your charges and neither has Herod," he tells the religious authorities. Yet the crowd calls for his death anyway. Pilate protests. He has found no evil in Jesus, he says, and will release him. The crowd calls for his death. The hour has come.

We meet up with two thieves being crucified with Jesus and the one puts the stop to the other's taunting comments by telling that thief, basically, to shut his mouth – "We deserve what we are getting. We are guilty," he says. "But this man, this man has done nothing wrong." And when Jesus hangs lifeless on the cross, the Roman centurion who witnesses the entire scene, praises God and once more proclaims "Jesus is innocent."

Not only does Luke make sure we know that Jesus is wholly innocent – not one single dark blot of sin or guilt mars this human – Luke also emphasizes that Jesus is completely in charge. The hour has come.

Jesus is fully aware and fully in charge of the events leading to his death on the cross. He claims all of the authority belonging to him as he makes a new covenant and confers the kingdom on his disciples. He acknowledges that he rules the kingdom he brings to us. He chooses when to speak and when not to speak as he is being beaten and mocked. He grants entry into paradise to the one thief who turns to him. He directs his Father to forgive us, the ones crucifying him. And he hands over his spirit to his Father and takes his final breath. The hour has come.

Completely innocent and in control. Why are these things so important for Luke to pass along to us?

Luke's stress on Jesus' innocence lets us know that, on one level, this is an all-too familiar story: "Powerful and privileged people conspire with Roman officials to engineer the destruction of someone whose message and popularity pose a serious threat to the business-as-usual abuses perpetuated by religious and imperial systems" (Matt Skinner, workingpreacher.org). Jesus' control of the situation tells us, on another level, this is a story with cosmic significance. Jesus embraces the dire consequences of the world's broken systems and people in order to bring the world and us in line with God's purpose. God desires to redeem every last bit of the brokenness running rampant through his good creation. And God uses our brokenness to do this. Many stories throughout Scripture tell us that God is able to take what we give him and turn it to good to further his plan to bring all things into perfection through Christ.

God knew that the human lust for power and control would lead to death on the cross. God came to us anyway. And through his death on the cross he accomplishes life for us – eternal life with him. Jesus, the man from Nazareth, was the first to receive a baptism of water and the Holy Spirit. Claimed as God's Son, he then lived a

life of baptismal ministry – proclaiming the kingdom and drawing creation closer to God. In his death, his baptism was complete – he fully entered into God’s kingdom, raised in glory never to die again. Because he was the first, he makes it possible for us to follow in his footsteps – baptized into Christ, claimed as a child of God, we live a life of baptismal ministry proclaiming God’s kingdom and drawing creation closer to God, awaiting our resurrection in glory.

What an astounding gift. The hour has come...it is time for us to think on this gift. Are we living into this amazing gift? Luke shows us today that this task is not easy. The voice of the world is strong and can prevail. Pilate is not able to release Jesus. The loud, insistent voice of the crowd is heard above the plea of innocence. The religious authorities corrupted by worldly power get their way. A human institution meant to follow God’s ways fails miserably and actually nails God to the cross – a dire warning for the human institutional trappings of the church. The synagogue, the Temple, the Church...we must remind ourselves, are *not* human-made institutions though. The Church is called into existence by God. We are gathered together by the Holy Spirit. Our every decision, every word, every action is to proclaim God’s kingdom and draw creation closer to God. Throughout Lent we reflect on our lives in order to discover and remove barriers that may be keeping us from God, by engaging in practices like prayer, extra almsgiving, taking something on, or giving something up. Now, as we are about to witness once more the disturbing depths of human cruelty and the amazing depth of God’s love all rolled into one image – Jesus nailed to the wood of the cross – we must choose which voice prevails in our lives...the clamouring voice of the world calling for death or the still small voice of God offering life...The hour has come.