

Good Friday Reflection

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John 18-19; Psalm 69

The worship song “My Life is in You, Lord” got me through my labor, right up until transition, when I birthed my daughter. As the waves of pain coursed through my body, I focused on a pink flower in the wallpaper border of the labor room, and breathed in time with the music that I heard in my soul: “My life is in you, Lord, my strength is in you Lord, my hope is in you Lord, in you, it’s in you.” No one heard it but me. I didn’t have a recording with me, and I didn’t need one; the song was a gift of the Holy Spirit cuing up a tune inside me that we sang often in church in those days, reminding me that God was with me and the faith of the community with me too.

Jesus would have known the words of the psalms by heart, and it has been suggested that Jesus was singing some psalm prayers (because the psalms were always sung) audibly or internally, from the cross. In Matthew and Mark’s telling we hear a phrase from Psalm 22: “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” John hints that Jesus was praying Psalm 69, fulfilling scripture by saying, “I am thirsty.” I can imagine Jesus clinging to the sacred psalter engraved on his soul since childhood and praying through his pain on the cross, the Holy Spirit cuing up the words and breathing the love of God in him.

As you hear the words of Psalm 69, listen for Jesus’ passion story you just heard. And listen for your life, too. I invite you to close your eyes and let these words reverberate through you:

Sing/intone

Save me, O God

For the waters have come up to my neck.

I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold.

I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me.

I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched.

Speak: I AM THIRSTY

Sing/intone:

My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God

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More in number than the hairs of my head are those who hate me without cause

Many are those who would destroy me, my enemies who accuse me falsely

What I did not steal, must I now restore?

O God, you know my folly; the wrongs I have done are not hidden from you.

Do not let those who hope in you be put to shame because of me, O Lord God of Hosts; do not let those who seek you be dishonored because of me, O God of Israel

It is for your sake that I have borne reproach, that shame has covered my face.

I have become a stranger to my kindred, an alien to my mother's children.

Speak: Woman, behold your son.

Speak: Friend, behold your mother.

Sing/intone:

It is zeal for your house that has consumed me; the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.

Speak: Crucify him, Crucify him

Sing/intone:

When I humbled my soul for fasting, they insulted me for doing so.

When I made sackcloth my clothing, I became a byword to them.

I am the subject of gossip for those who sit in the gate, and the drunkards make songs about me.

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But as for me, my prayer is to you, O Lord.

At an acceptable time, O God, in the abundance of your steadfast love, answer me.

With your faithful help rescue me from sinking in the mire;

Let me be delivered from my enemies and from the deep waters.

Do not let the flood sweep over me, or the deep swallow me up, or the Pit close its mouth over me.

Speak: Father, remove this cup from me...

Sing/intone:

Answer me, O Lord, for your steadfast love is good; according to your abundant mercy, turn to me.

Speak: Not my will but thy will...

Sing/intone:

Do not hide your face from your servant, for I am in distress- make haste to answer me.

Draw near to me, redeem me, set me free because of my enemies.

You know the insults I receive, and my shame and my dishonor; my foes are all known to you. Insults have broken my heart, so that I am in despair.

I looked for pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none.

They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst, they gave me vinegar to drink.

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Speak: They gave him sour wine to drink.

Speak: And Jesus said, "It is Finished."

Psalm 69 continues, but Jesus refused to go on. He made what musicians call railroad tracks—a big cessura that is a complete stop and silence—right there. Jesus said, “It is finished.” He entrusted his spirit, his life, his breath, to God, and all of creation was stunned into unresolved dissonant silence.

Growing up, one of our churches always had a seven last words of Christ on the cross service. I have heard a lot of sermons on “I am thirsty” and “It is finished.” But I cannot ever recall hearing what Jesus did NOT say from the cross.

Listen to the words that Jesus refused to pray from the cross. This is the next section of Psalm 69 (read):

Let their table be a trap for them, a snare for their allies

Let their eyes be darkened so they cannot see

Make their loins tremble continually

Pour out your indignation on them

Let your burning anger overtake them

Make their camp a desolation, let no one live in their tents

For they persecute those whom you have struck down, and those whom you have wounded, they attack still more

Add guilt to their guilt; may they have no acquittal from you

Let them be blotted out of the book of the living;

Let them not be enrolled among the righteous

But I am lowly and in pain; let your salvation, O God, protect ME.

Jesus did not pretend that he was not hurt, offended, wronged, harmed, betrayed, and even heartbroken. He acknowledged what was happening to him and fully experienced and expressed it. But vengeance, striking back, returning hurt for hurt, attacking, were simply not in his vocabulary. It was not weakness. He had the power of God to accomplish every one of

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those wrath-filled petitions in the second part of that psalm. But Jesus, revealer of God, chose instead the stronger words, “It is finished.” This is what saving grace looks like. Let us pray:

Lord, we cry out to you for mercy. We cry out to you from the broken hurting places in the world and in our personal lives. And we yield our spirit, our breath that wants to demand retribution and destruction, into your hands, so the spirit of Christ may fill us and speak for us where we cannot, it is finished. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer. Amen.