

Good Friday -- John 18:1 - John 19:42

You are the Kidron Valley. You lie to the east of Jerusalem, between the Temple Mount and the Mount of Olives. Half of the year, you are just a dry gulch, a wadi but now after the Winter and Spring rains, water runs through you, water mixed with blood from all the sacrifices offered on the altar in the Temple. Long, long ago King David stumbled across you, weeping and barefoot, fleeing from his own son Absalom who had betrayed him. Now another man, crosses over you on his way to the garden with his confused and fearful disciples. Some say he is a king as well.

You are Judas, son of Simon Iscariot. Some people say you were a thief and that is why you betrayed Jesus -- because of greed. Maybe it was that. Other versions of your story say that after you had led the authorities to the Garden where you knew Jesus would be that you repented and returned the money to the chief priests. Filled with self-loathing, you hanged yourself. There was a moment earlier this night, when you dipped your bread into the bowl when you dipped your bread in the bowl at the same time he did. He looked at you then, and his eyes were not full of anger or hatred, but grief, deep grief. For a moment, you felt it too, a fierce pain in your heart and you hesitated -- but then he said, "go and do what you have to do." And your heart hardened again. Now you are leading a band of men with clubs and torches to take him, you betray him with a kiss.

You are Peter. You have been with Jesus from the beginning. You know he is the promised one, the Messiah, how else could he do the things he does? But there is so much you do not understand. He says that God is being glorified in him -- yes, you see that -- but then in the same breath he says that he must die. He says to love one another, that you are one with him and the Father. Yes! But then he says when you tell him that you will defend him to the end, he says that you will deny him, three times before the cock crows. When rabble comes to the Garden to take him, you pull out your sword and strike. See Lord, I will defend you! But then he tells you to put it away, and speaks of drinking from the cup that God has given him. Later you will follow when they take him to house of the High Priest, and when they keep saying that you are one of his disciples, you are terrified. The denials tumble out of your mouth, and after the third one, a rooster crows...you remember what he said and you weep.

You are the religious authorities. Above all you must uphold the law and keep order. This Jesus is dangerous. It is better for him to be eliminated than to have the Romans turn their wrath on the people. You tell yourself that the fact that Jesus insulted you is beside the point. Yes, you want to be free of the Roman oppression, but this Galilean trouble maker will not be the one who does it. You are only thinking of what is best for the people.

You are Pontius Pilate, the Prefect, the governor of Judea. Passover is always a tense time in Jerusalem when they remember their story about how their nameless god liberated them for Egypt. This year seems especially unsettled. The Judean religious authorities want you to get rid of this Jesus, to crucify him, but really what has he done? Blasphemed apparently against their peculiar religious notions. You question him, but he does not say much. He does speak of truth - and you ask him what is truth? In the end you will give the High Priest and his cronies what they want because it is expedient. Crucifixions are a nasty business, but they serve their purpose. They are a visceral warning and sign of the true power of the empire.

You are Mary, the mother of Jesus. You stand at the foot of the cross, where the other women support you, and it is a good thing that they do because otherwise your knees would buckle and give way beneath you. How can this be happening to your son, to the baby boy you nursed; the child you watch working with Joseph. You remember that day at the wedding when you told him with a raised eyebrows and a playful smile, "They are out of wine..." How can this be happening to your son who healed and taught and even called his friend out of the tomb?

You are Jesus. You knew this was coming just as you knew about the denial, the betrayal, the desertion by your friends. What you didn't know was how much it would hurt. It is like when you stood outside Lazarus' tomb; you knew God would raise him, but still you wept with grief when you saw and heard the grief of his sisters, your dear friends. Just as grief pierced your heart when you were dipping your bread in the bowl with Judas and you looked in his eyes and saw him look away; just as when you told Peter that he would deny you three times before the rooster crowed. And now here on the cross, there is so much pain, you can hardly breathe, and you are ready, but you look down and see your mother and your friend standing there and there is one last very human detail to take care of. "Woman, here is your son. Here is your mother." And then....and then it is finished.

You are the Heart of God. You hold it all. You hold the betrayed and the betrayers. You hold the crucifiers and the crucified. You hold joy and laughter and love, grief and tears, anger and doubt. You have been broken and pierced a million million times by human ignorance and fear. And still you hold everything; you hold it as tenderly and as surely as a stone tomb will cradle his body.