

## Mark 15: 21-32

21 They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. <sup>22</sup>Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). <sup>23</sup>And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. <sup>24</sup>And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

25 It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. <sup>26</sup>The inscription of the charge against him read, 'The King of the Jews.' <sup>27</sup>And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. <sup>29</sup>Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, 'Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, <sup>30</sup>save yourself, and come down from the cross!' <sup>31</sup>In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. <sup>32</sup>Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.' Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

**Meditation:** This scene has all the stuff of passion! All the details (e.g. wine mixed with myrrh, casting lots over Jesus' clothes, etc.) reflect the significance of what is happening to Jesus. Not only is his crucifixion the fulfillment of scripture, it is ultimately a fulfillment of God's will to 'save' (which means to make what is broken whole) the world. For the gospel witness this world is one that rejects Jesus as the revelation of God's word made flesh, crucifies divine love incarnate in this human being. What is done to Jesus is a microcosm of what has been and continues to be done every day in how we destruct and self-destruct life in the world. Yet at the same time, the mocking inscription above Jesus that he is the king reflects, ironically, the truth of all truths, declared unwittingly by a world that is doomed but for the infinite, forgiving love of God. While the details of what was involved in crucifixion are spared us in this account, we know enough to know that it was gruesomely painful and terribly humiliating. But this convicts no-one from among the spectators it seems, at least those who have the gall to say something. The taunts and insults continue to be hurled. All stand condemned. All stand in desperate need of forgiveness, more than they could ever imagine.

The great political theologian and social ethicist Reinhold Niebuhr once wrote a book entitled: *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. In it, he argued that individuals may follow their conscience and hesitate to commit cruel, hurtful and unthinking acts when on their own. But when in mass groups, they are emboldened and even possessed to participate in terrible things said and done that may be regretted later. At the same time, it is also true that individuals who want to find the courage to support good causes may lack the courage on their own if and when there is risk and threat involved, but will become emboldened when in a group. Basically, groups embolden us as individuals when we join them. The question is: do we participate in things that enrich our humanity as children of God or demean and destroy it? We need the courage to discern our own path and stand on our own, especially when a group or family may oppose us for so doing.

Thinking about what's happening in our world right now, there are protests against racism and police brutality. As restrictions are easing people gather in large groups and behave in ways that are unsafe and a threat to the larger good of containing the spread of the virus. As we approach Pride weekend some of us think of the exhilaration and pride of participating boldly in rallies and marches, celebrating the freedom to be embraced as fully human in all our sexual and gender diversity as children of God.

But where do we stand as individual persons in our own heart and soul all too often in our relationships and commitments? We accept certain things, but is that also becoming complicit in things that are wrong and need to be addressed? Are we sacrificing our integrity by ignoring certain micro-aggressions, ignorance, racism or bold and callous disregard for truth and justice by those around us because we'd rather not address and engage them? Is comfort and convenience a privilege it is time we gave up in order to become higher human beings? Where do we find the support to become better, more committed, more prepared to take a risk in being bold in our truthfulness with ourselves and those around us? It is time. Jesus is crucified. Will we abandon him in our own heart and soul if not in our lack of action or engagement?

**Prayer:** We are in this story, O God. I am in this story. Too much in my life has been determined by fear – fear of being left out, fear of displeasing certain people, fear of taking them on, fear of rising up to become the person I know I can become but lack the courage and faith all too often. Do I lack enough love for others for choosing the way of patience and complacency rather than being more truthful with them? Do I accept things about myself I have a hard time accepting in others? Do others challenge me, provoke me or embolden me in negative ways because of how I have not taken responsibility for my own failings or my own personhood to be myself rather than trying to fit into somebody else's image for me? Even as you continue to be crucified in this world, O God, may I become that much less a part of all that in my own life. May your ongoing solidarity in my crucifixion and your forgiveness of my complacency, fear and rebellion against your love, sow fresh seeds in me to become the beautiful flower you have dreamed me to become; Amen.