Palm/Passion Sunday

A PASSIONATE GOD
Mark 14-15.47
Palm/Passion Sunday
Analysis by Timothy J. Hoyer

Mark 14.61b-64

Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" 62Jesus said, "I am; and 'you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power,' and 'coming with the clouds of heaven.'"

63Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "Why do we still need witnesses? 64You have heard his blasphemy! What is your decision?" All of them condemned him as deserving death.

Mark 15.24-39

24And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

25It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. 26The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." 27And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. 29Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, 30save yourself, and come down from the cross!" 31In 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. 32Let 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.

33When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 34At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" 35When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." 36And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." 37Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. 38And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. 39Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

DIAGNOSIS: Our Persistent Pursuit

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *There's a Problem with Jesus*

We don't like Jesus claiming to be God. Those who sentenced him to death (14:63) for his blasphemy (14:62) already had a unique relationship with God-God freeing them from slavery and giving them God's law and the land they lived on. So they did not like Jesus claiming to be God and taking away what they were familiar with and comfortable with, what was truth to them. Not that they didn't like change. They liked the way their relationship with God worked. They liked being told what they had to do in order to have God's steadfast love shown to them and to the thousandth generation of those who love God and keep God's commandments (Lent 3, First Reading: Ex 20:6). By being told what to do, they could follow the rules, they could achieve a goal, and be rewarded. They could brag, "Look at how good I am." Of course, they had to ignore "No one is good but God alone." We all like

to brag, to be rewarded, to win someone's heart, and to do "it" on our own. We ignore that to earn love means we do not trust the person to give us love, and that we don't want them to give it. We do not trust God to give us love and we don't want God to give it. Our problem with Jesus is that he was giving his love to people. Even worse, he was giving his love to people who didn't follow the rules, who didn't earn his love, and they were not capable of earning his love. They didn't deserve it. Worse of all, he claimed that his love was God's love, therefore his was a love that proved people were now right with God because Jesus said so, using the words, "Your sin is forgiven. Your faith (in me) has saved you."

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *There's a Problem Trusting Jesus*

To forgive someone means that, after one has been offended, the offended one gives up the right of revenge, satisfaction, punishment (the law's ways of dealing with offense). Jesus, by forgiving unworthy people, declared that God would transfer onto Jesus the divine right to judge, to accuse, to punish, and to put to death. Therefore, because of Jesus, God would not exercise the right to condemn people, and instead would be merciful and forgiving. But for those who liked to win God's mercy by their own merits, the relationship they thought they had achieved with God was deflated; if everyone else was handed God's mercy, they were no longer so special. Their effort was rendered meaningless. ("God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God" 1 Cor. 1:28-29). But no one likes to have effort made meaningless or reduced to nothing. Even worse, Jesus himself had been condemned and put to death according to the law; he could not be trusted.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *There's a Problem When Jesus Isn't Trusted*

When Jesus is not trusted to gain us forgiveness, then we are still trying to gain God's mercy. We try to "make it up" to God after we break a few of the laws that God wants us to keep. But no one will be acquitted for not following God's instructions. For not following God's instructions is more than not listening, more than not doing what we're told. Not following God's instructions is to turn our back on God, to not trust God or love God. We have committed the blasphemy of saying God is not God. For that sin there is only condemnation, for the law is a ministry of condemnation (2 Cor. 3). There is only death, for the law is a ministry of death (2 Cor. 3). That's our death. That death is made to happen by God. We do not have God's mercy. That's the problem when we don't trust Jesus to be the Son of God who actually has the authority to forgive us.

PROGNOSIS: God's Gracious Response

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Jesus Is the Son of God*

Jesus is put to death on a cross. We hear that story read on Passion Sunday. The death penalty was given to Jesus because of his crime against divinity-calling himself God, and saying that he took the condemnation and death God meant for us and he took it upon himself. He went against God's will of the law. But Jesus did more than that. He truly did it for our sake. He did it because God sent him to do it. We read this story of Jesus' death because we know what happened next. God raised Jesus from the dead! God declared that actually Jesus was not committing blasphemy. He was telling us the truth. He is God's way of saving us from condemnation and death. We read the Passion Story of Jesus' death because we know he was raised from the dead.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (External Solution) : *We Are Given Faith in Jesus as Our God*

Hearing that Jesus died and rose for us, hearing that Jesus

forgives us and so makes us right with God, we realize that we do not have to (and shouldn't even try to) achieve a relationship with God by our merits; we also do not have to work to improve our status for others. We have been given our meaning, our worth, and our relationship with God. Our meaning, worth, and relationship with God is Jesus. Our relationship with God is receiving God's forgiveness through Jesus. We become nothing with Jesus in his death so that we can be everything to God through Jesus.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *We Live by Faith and Not by Sight*

Seeing rewards, hearing applause, getting compliments are things we can see. The law does give visible rewards. But in Jesus, we do not live by getting rewards from the system of laws and its rewards and punishments. In Jesus, we are already forgiven. That is our reward, a reward we hear. We do not have to achieve something to be recognized by God. God knows us because we are in Jesus. We recognize that Jesus is for others, and so we speak forgiveness to them. We serve them. We suffer wrong instead of insisting that we are right. We listen to the story of Jesus' suffering, suffered for us, so that we can be passionate about Jesus and his forgiveness for us and for others.