

“You Think This Happened Only Once and Long Ago?”<sup>1</sup>

Good Friday is a curious day. When we read or hear the Gospel accounts everything, except for the crowds, seems so matter of fact. There is the rigged trial before the Sanhedrin, while just outside the chamber in the courtyard Peter denies even knowing Jesus. Then there is the transporting of Jesus to Pilate, then to Herod, then back to Pilate. Two men who are said to have despised each other, playing a game of political deference with a man’s life. Pilate questions Jesus and in this Gospel they have a bit of a philosophical discussion about truth. The whipping of Jesus is a formality. The Romans always did it before a crucifixion to weaken the one being put to death. The crown of thorns and purple robe may have been impromptu, but it is just the sort of thing that soldiers do to humiliate and dehumanize a prisoner before execution.

In John, the trip to Golgotha is uneventful. There are no jeering crowds. Jesus does not fall. He carries his cross through the crowded streets of Jerusalem, and no one seems to pay much attention. Once on the cross, Jesus resumes control of the situation. He speaks carefully to his mother and the disciple whom he loved. He does not express pain nor does he express anger at God. He stays in control to the last moment when he says “It is finished” and gives up his spirit.

Even those around him seem calm. Nicodemus who earlier had a discourse with Jesus at night, because he feared his fellow members of the Sanhedrin, comes out in the daylight and assists Joseph of Arimathea with the removal of the body from the cross and preparation for burial, using an extraordinary amount of spices. At this point everyone goes away in sorrow.

Whether we follow John’s account or the accounts of the other three evangelists we tend to think this is something that happened once and long ago.<sup>1</sup> It is not. Christ is crucified every day. Christ is crucified when a girl is assaulted for going to school as Shamsia was in Afghanistan. Christ is crucified when the Rohingya people are persecuted by the Myanmar government. Christ is crucified when nations go to war, and innocents are slaughtered whether it is in Katyn, Poland, Oradour-sur-Glane, France, or My Lai, Vietnam. Whether it is Christians slaughtering Muslims during the crusades or Christians slaughtering Christians in Ireland and France and Switzerland over their ownership of Christ. Christ is crucified every time someone utters a racial slur, or when a child is terrorized by schoolmates for the color of his skin.

We do not seem to learn. The Crucifixion should have happened only once and long ago. Even if no one else learned the lesson of summary judgment and the brutality of capital punishment we who call ourselves Christians should have. We who know that our Lord and Savior was murdered by the religious and political powers of his day should know better, but we don’t. We just keep on keepin’ on with the same blind and brutal ways of our ancestors. It is true that the sins of the fathers are visited on their children. Until we can break the cycle of bloodlust, vengeance, and fear Good Friday will haunt us as it does each year. Only when we break that cycle will Good Friday truly be good and the darkness at noon will finally break through into glorious light for Jesus will never again be crucified in vain.

---

<sup>1</sup> Title borrowed from a poem by Marie Howe in her book *The Kingdom of Ordinary Time: Poems*©2008.