

“We wait. We watch. We pray.”

As I have read and pondered the scriptures of Holy Week I have been intrigued by the dichotomies of dark and light, evil and good, and fear and hope. Underlying or running through all of this is the element of confusion.

These are not particularly unusual aspects to encounter in times of crisis. Certainly Holy Week is a time of crisis; especially as the synoptic gospels (Mark, Matthew and Luke) report the events.

The festival of Passover was going to be a tense time in Jerusalem anyway. Passover is the Jewish celebration of their liberation by God from the Egyptians. Yet they were celebrating this under the eyes of their latest oppressor—The Romans. As the week progresses, Jerusalem will be overflowing with pilgrims coming to celebrate the holy days. As more enter the city tensions will grow and tempers flare, if for no other reason than the crush of people filling up the city and the Temple Mount.

Throughout the week people gathered in the outer precincts of the Temple gossiping, meeting friends, and talking politics. It was like a vast church coffee hour with thousands of people in attendance. All the time they were being spied upon by the Roman troops garrisoned in the Antonia Fortress which overlooked the Temple Mount.

There was a sense within the city that something dramatic might happen. The Romans sensed this as did the Temple authorities. They were ready to come down hard on anything that looked like it could lead to insurrection or violence. Adding to the tension was the presence of Jesus and the attendant eagerness to hear his teaching, preaching and see his miracles. There were several incidents among Jesus and his followers that added to the pressure building in the city.

First, during Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem there were crowds cheering him on. Certain religious leaders looked askance at this show of popularity. Some even implored Jesus to silence the crowds. They want to tone down the situation to prevent the Romans from noticing what is going on. They are also concerned that what seems like a joyful parade could turn into a riot.

Jesus' running the money changers and sellers of sacrificial animals out of the Temple further stirs up the situation. People need to get their money changed in order to make an offering (Roman money was no good because it had Caesar's image on it). They needed to be able to purchase animals to make their sacrifice at the altar. Jesus' actions upsets business as usual.

The good guys and the bad guys in these situations depended on your point of view. It also depended on the latest rumors running through the crowd. There was no social media to fan the flames, but people have always liked to talk and speculate, and there are some people who like to make mischief for mischief's sake. The result as uncertainty and competing interests come into play is “moral bewilderment.”¹ There is uncertainty among the people about who is acting bravely and who is just a troublemaker, what is truth and what are only unfounded rumors and lies.

¹ A term used by Norman Mclean in his book *Young Men and Fire* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992] p.143

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Good Friday, Year C

You and I know what is going to happen but we look on fascinated at how the men and women act. We wonder if we would have been as courageous as some of the women or as cowardly as most of the men. Would we have shouted “Crucify him” or melted into the crowds picking up a disguise along the way. This uncertainty makes the events of Holy Week even more poignant.

We cannot know what we would have done during that momentous week almost two thousand years ago. So we do what we can now. We wait. We watch. We pray a psalm. We sing and chant. We give our hearts over to the one who gave his all for us, and we vow anew to live faithfully and lovingly through the power of God’s grace.