

Holy Week A (4/8/20)
Entering the Passion of Jesus
Chapter 6: Gethsemane: Risking Temptation
Mark 14:32-52

"I am deeply grieved, even unto death; remain here and keep awake."

The temptation for Jesus is to abandon his purpose, to evade the consequence of his messianic ministry. "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible," he prays in distress, "remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want." Even moments before his arrest, Jesus acknowledges that there might yet be an alternative to the cross. Still, the silence he hears in response to his prayer does not prevent him from facing those who would do him harm, and thereby bearing witness to God's sovereignty over violence and death.

The temptation for us is to imagine this series of events as a cold calculation. We've often viewed Jesus' death as a necessary transaction to appease God, the proverbial "pound of flesh" to set things right between earth and heaven. But, God does not look down on the cross with detached approval. No, the crucifixion is a devastating event in the internal life of the triune God. Amy-Jill Levine puts it this way: "Jesus will suffer, and God will suffer as well. The darkening clouds at the cross are divine pathos. The rending of the Temple veil represents not some form of new access to God, since God is everywhere and everyone always has access. Rather, it represents God's mourning, for in Judaism, the sign of mourning is to tear one's garment."¹

Imagine losing your child to violence. Imagine their public humiliation and fatal injury and dying breaths. How would you react?

If Christ is deeply grieved, then so are God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. The true judgment of God upon humankind is that we are hostile to the innocent one, and thus to God. We are more inclined to tear down than to build up, to dispense with rather than to preserve, to suppress rather than to seek to understand.

Still, God does not abandon us to our hostility. The faithfulness of Christ in the face of violence emboldens us to pursue God's reign of justice and mercy in spite of the risks. "Entering the Passion should give us courage," Levine writes, "courage to lament, to embrace righteous anger, to see the course to the end. And entering the Passion should give us comfort as well – the comfort of knowing that death is not the end of the story...."²

¹ 135.

² 142-3.