

March 29, 2013

**Good Friday**

Luke 22:39-53

All Saints' Episcopal Church, Atlanta, Georgia

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## **The Garden and the Arrest**

*This is your hour and the power of darkness*

“This is your hour and the power of darkness” Jesus says to the forces arrayed against him. “Day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour and the power of darkness.”

Most obviously, Jesus is addressing the chief priests, the officers of the temple police and the elders who had come for him. He is addressing the officials, those who are feeling most responsible, most anxious, most caught in the middle between a growing movement, possibly the beginnings of yet another insurrection that will be ruthlessly put down by the occupying Roman forces all around them. They are trying to do the right thing, trying to avoid inciting a riot themselves by arresting Jesus at night and trying to avoid the Roman powers keeping the peace through violence as well. The officials are trying to protect their Jewish identity and their ability to have some measure of independence of thought and action, especially in regard to the practices of their faith. The last thing they need is a tremor in the force when Jerusalem is packed with the faithful gathered for the Passover. In this, their interests aligned with the Romans after all. To good people trying to exercise responsibility without recognizing that sometimes change is not incremental, not something that comes from consensus, but something that is both urgent and right, Jesus says:

*This is your hour and the power of darkness*

And then there is Judas. Judas, one of his intimate friends who walked with him from Galilee, who dined with him at the home of Lazarus, who was, apparently, trusted with the funds that Jesus and his group were able to cobble together. Luke explains Judas' actions as being those of the devil. Luke 22, verses 3 to 6: “Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was one of the twelve; he went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers of the temple police about how he might betray him to them. They were greatly pleased and agreed to give him money. So he consented and began to look for an opportunity to betray him to them when no crowd was present.” Other gospels suggest that Judas was born and created for this betrayal so that God's will could be fulfilled. Perhaps he was disappointed that Jesus was not the kind of Messiah he expected. Or maybe this whole story of Judas is a creation of the early church and part of the origins of Christian Anti- Semitism. Betrayal, whatever its genesis and for whatever reason, is an ugly thing, a breach of trust; and to betray with a sign of friendship and trust, to betray with a kiss, the ugliest betrayal of all, a clear perversion of

what is right and good and holy. To all those who express disappointment and anger and even disgust at the Son of Man, especially those claiming some kind of inside or superior knowledge of what is going on; to the apostate and the atheist, Jesus says:

*This is your hour and the power of darkness*

The other disciples of course are there with him. Well, sort of with him. He tells them to pray that they may not come into the time of trial, the same time of trial or testing or temptation that we pray to be spared whenever we pray the Lord's Prayer. It is the same time of trial that Jesus himself is facing in his own prayer. It is the time when the question is called: can you live with integrity, and be the person you were created to be and put your whole trust in God's grace and love even in the face of inevitable suffering and your likely death? In the time of trial we put our life on the line for faith or trust that the one who gave life in the first place brings new life even out of death. "Is there some other way Lord? By the ministry of an angel from heaven, by the reminder of what is really true, by the alignment of the universe, Jesus is strengthened to answer as we aspire to answer in imitation of our Lord's Prayer "Thy will be done." But the disciples are sleeping, overcome by grief—maybe—but sleeping nonetheless. The reason is almost irrelevant. Keep praying. When you succumb to that temptation to let go, to hide, to withdraw, to indulge or to sleep, to say 'what the hell?', you are surely shutting down, perhaps welcoming death itself. 'Do not go gentle into that good night' rails the poet with all the force of the gospel, 'rage, rage against the dying of the light' for when you succumb, Jesus says:

*This is your hour and the power of darkness*

The poor are present too. The oppressed. The enslaved. Victims the world over. The ones who always, always pay a terrible price for violence. it is a slave who is injured in the turmoil of all this anxiety in the darkness. It is the weakest who bear the burden when we allow violence to be an option in our responses to life. I confess that I have not been able to renounce violence as an option in a sinful and broken world. I don't want to carry a gun and I don't want you to do that either because sooner or later that gun is going to get used. But I want dangerous people imprisoned and virulent enemies resisted with force when necessary. I'm going to resist evil with everything I can, but I recognize that there may well be times when I'm just one more relatively powerful person creating another situation for which the poor will end up paying the price. If that is also true for you, then in those moments, Jesus is also addressing us and saying:

*This is your hour and the power of darkness*

But to the rich and the poor, to the slave and the free, to the perpetrators of violence and to the victims of violence Jesus also says "**No more of this**" and offers his healing touch. **Enough. No more.** In this hour the power of darkness is revealed for what it is: the mechanisms by which we try and manage our anxieties, the ways in which we

intentionally and unintentionally create victims, the multitude of ways we fail in the time of trial. This power of darkness will be revealed in these three hours while we keep watch and bear witness. And as the veil of the temple is torn, so what is unveiled is not only our mechanisms of violence, but also a new way, the way of absolute integrity and absolute trust in God for life even in the face of death. God's healing touch is present in the world even now, but before we rush too quickly there we must sit for a while with the chilling judgment as Jesus says to all of us:

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