

April 2, 2010

**Good Friday, Year C**

Luke 22:66-23:12

All Saints' Episcopal Church, Atlanta, Georgia

*The Rev'd Geoffrey M. St. J. Hoare, rector*

## **THE BETRAYAL**

*And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before they had been at enmity with each other.* It is proverbial that misery loves company. Two men whom Luke portrays as fundamentally weak become friends as they perpetrate a miserable act. Herod Antipas is the man who has been spurned and ignored by the Roman Procurator rather than being invited into the corridors of real power. He was nothing like his father, Herod the Great. He was a *tetrarch* or ruler of a quarter of the territory of his father, the very definition of a weak and petty tyrant who had put John the Baptist to death for criticizing his marriage, a minor celebrity trying to muzzle the press after his adulterous affair is discovered.

And all of a sudden confirmation that the Procurator knows of his existence and recognizes a measure of authority. It is as though he has been called to the head office to be given an assignment by the boss. And the boss is no great shakes himself, someone with a famous relative given a position in the administration through nepotism rather than talent and clearly not that interested in doing much with his job, trying here, as ever, to fob off responsibility on someone else.

And they became friends with each other that very day. Oh, that luscious fellow-feeling in the face of evil. Oh, that wonderful sense of togetherness that makes it so difficult to stand up for the innocent and makes it so easy to create another victim. It is amazing how easy it is to go along with the crowd.

When I was a teenager I was a regular in the stands at Portman Road. Portman Road is the home of Ipswich Town Football Club, whose fortunes have waxed and waned over the years. It is fun to support a team, to be part of the crowd. Nowadays all fans have seats, a safety measure after some terrible accidents in the stands, the places where we quite literally stood and cheered and shoved almost being carried as the crowd surged when something exciting happened. But there was a dark side to all this fun and that was how quickly those crowds could turn violent. Taunting the visiting team's supporters was part of the fun until, fueled by alcohol, some of the thugs (these were the days of skinheads) would find people in the wrong colors in town after the game and would beat them up. I remember visiting a few years later after I had moved to America and there was a barbed wire fence separating the opposing fans from the rest of the crowd. We were asked to stay in our seats until they had left after the game where they were escorted onto their buses to go back to Birmingham or Leeds or wherever it was.

We walked past those buses on the way to our cars and the people inside were screaming at us, thumping the windows, and taunting the police who were everywhere. Let's not forget that this is all a game and is meant to be fun. How quickly togetherness creates 'otherness,' and we can always hate and fear and kill the other.

Scott Roeder was sentenced yesterday to fifty years in prison with no possibility of parole for stalking and murdering a doctor called George Tiller who performed late term abortions. He said he was following 'God's Law' when he committed his horrible crime. In mitigation it was suggested that he was 'a churchgoer'.

Unfortunately the church he went to on the day of the murder was Dr. Tiller's church. But you know how many sermons he had heard about abortion being the real crime and how the unborn needed protectors. And you know how good it felt to talk about the sermon over coffee afterwards and agree that the godless liberals are ruining the country and how good it felt to know that he was among the god fearers and on the side of right over against evil. You see togetherness can create otherness even here. Why is it that we prefer a full church to a sparsely filled one (except perhaps today.)?

As a schoolboy I always preferred house plays and being on house rowing teams over school plays and school teams. I liked the sense that we were all in it together and the sense of community within the larger community. Togetherness doesn't have to lead to otherness and competition does not have to become a matter of life and death, but somehow the forces of togetherness keep leading to separateness.

When I moved to Washington DC in 1987, I was quite regularly at parties with both republicans and democrats. When I left in 1998, that experience was the exception rather than the rule. Being sociable with people of the other party was getting harder and harder. Today we are seeing 'party discipline' being taken to the level of making sure that candidates have ideological purity, and political discourse is marked by anger and sloganeering and mean-spiritedness rather than civility and the sense that we are all trying to do the right thing.

*And Herod and Pilate became friends that very day.* They had mocked Jesus, struck him, reviled him. They had accused and taunted him "Are you the Son of God then?" Ridiculous. Preposterous. Absurd.

What Jesus does is refuse to participate in these kangaroo courts. He won't dignify the proceedings with a defense. He keeps putting the spotlight back on the behavior of the judges—You say that I am the Son of God—and as often happens when we name bad behavior, we become the issue. "What further testimony do we need? We have heard blasphemy from his own lips." He is the problem. He is the issue. Not us. Not our behavior. Not our crowd pleasing. Not our togetherness creating otherness. We are not only right we are righteous.

*And Herod and Pilate became friends that very day.* Well isn't that special? And isn't that a mirror on our own behavior? And doesn't Jesus show us what we do? And in his integrity, show us another way, a better way, a more hopeful way for the future?