

Good Friday

John 18:12-14;19-24

The Great Three Hours

It was one of those nights. Just before Passover. One of those brooding, dark nights, that make you wonder if all is right with the world. Heaven forbid one of those nights when you wonder if anything in the world is right at all.

He was an ordinary looking man. Not too big and not too small. Mind you, I didn't get much of a look at him at first, as he was all bound up. Shoulders, arms and feet, they had even put sacking over his head. It seemed a bit much to me, especially as they had sent an out Army to get him.

They brought him in, he was pretty quiet, not struggling or trying to make a nuisance of himself. They took the sacking from his head and unbound him. They let him stand, and walk around a bit. In a strange way he seemed at home, not something I had seen before. These rebel leaders are usually all fire and wind, they shout, spit and curse.

Against the Romans, the Sanhedrin, and even Caesar if they're especially brave or foolish. By the time they get here, they are usually loud and going for it. I have always thought it's because they're frightened. Frightened of the power wielded in this room and of being in the High Priests palace.

But this guy looked like he was born to it. He simply got up, rubbed his wrists and ankles, had a bit of a walk round. He didn't say much, that is at least to begin with. He was very quiet ... no not quiet calm. He was very calm.

I have been here, doing this job, for what seems like an eternity. I signed on as a Levite, but I am from the line of Benjamin. It was a very high calling in the beginning. I enjoyed the studies, the thinking about the Law and the people, the helping out with the worship, but when my studies were over, they discovered I had another talent.

That was nearly 27 years ago and I have seen a few things since then, I can tell you. I have done a few things too. Not things that I am proud of, but things the boss says are ok, as we do them to protect the Temple, the Priests and other Levites, and especially him, the High Priest.

Which brings me back to that night, as I said it was dark and not right. The Temple torches were lit early, it was cold too if I remember rightly, oh it didn't feel a kind night. It wasn't a warm, friendly, generous night that one. It was cold, it was dark and it felt quite cruel.

This rebel leader was unbound and unsacked. He walked about for a bit, looking at the hangings and the silks, the painted walls and polished plates. I was sure I saw him smile. Again, somehow, I had a feeling this was not new to him. Lord knows why, the story was he was raised in a shack in Nazareth, and there is not much like this out there, that is for sure, but I would still swear...!

The Boss comes in. He's not a nice man, the Boss, a little bit like the night we were having. Dark, cool and cruel, a bit stooped and small. I have often wondered if his drive for control had anything to do with his size and shape, I've never been game enough to ask him or anyone else for that matter. He doesn't take kindly to that sort of thing.

Well, this interrogation went like most of the others that I have seen and been a part off.

The Boss gets up on his big seat, again, a good bit higher than the man before him and then he smiles. Well, I call it a smile, it's a little bit like a lizard with a fly, all of the cards held in the lizard's hand! And then he asks the rebel a question. When the rebel replied I thought he was being cheeky, so I gave him a slap. Not to hard mind you, I didn't really want to hurt

him, just remind him where he was and what was what, here. It doesn't do my shares any good if those lizard looks start coming my way, and the Boss gets the idea that I'm not looking after his interests. So, I slapped him.

I don't really remember what happened then, other than they took him away. I did hear that he had been crucified with the two thieves who had been caught at the market the week before. They made a racket about being sentenced I tell you.

This guy was just one of the many that passed through this place. He was just one of the many whose last words I heard. He was just one of the many who I slapped (and worse) for being cheeky, and to keep my job prospects up.

But he is the only one I remember. He is the only one I dream about. He is the only one whose face I see when I am praying. He is the only one who tugs on my conscience. It wasn't that long ago, but I can't shake this feeling. This feeling somehow, that what I did was wrong. This feeling somehow that it was all wrong. I can't do anything about what happened. I can't do anything about anything, and I had no power to make it stop. I certainly have no control over what the Boss does, and the thought of that lizard look coming my way, still makes my heart pail a little.... but what I do wish, what I do wish a lot Is, that I hadn't slapped him.

That, somehow, now, feels very wrong. Very wrong indeed.

Amen.