

## Suffering in Silence

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Most of us can be pretty prompt to complain when things don't go our way. I know I certainly can! Even little children quickly learn to cry out, "That's not fair!" "He was mean to me!" "She got more than me!" "I didn't do anything wrong!" There are all kinds of indignant refrains that we repeat [in some form or another] throughout much of our lives. How quickly we can cry and complain when unjust things happen to us, and Life just isn't fair.

Jesus, on this night before his death, goes to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. He asks Peter, James and John, three of his closest friends to stay and support him as he struggles with how to deal with the events that are unfolding before him. Yet while he grapples with this profound, pivotal Life-crisis, his friends simply fall asleep. *That's* not very fair! Then, another of his followers and friends, Judas Iscariot, leads a mob of temple police into the garden with torches and weapons - where he betrays Jesus, as if he were a common criminal. Sells him out to the religious authorities, sealed with a kiss. Talk about a reason to complain! "This isn't *fair!* I was *praying*, seeking the Will of God, and look at what my so-called friend has done! He stabbed me in the back for a sack

of silver!” But that is not Jesus’ response. Rather than scream and fuss and fight, Jesus tells his followers to put away their swords, and then he goes peacefully with his captors.

Now, do His friends come with him to support and encourage him? Not really. John supposedly follows at a distance, but he offers no impassioned plea for Jesus’ release. And to the servants in the outer courtyard, who probably can’t harm him, Simon Peter [Jesus’ Rock] *three times* denies that he even knows Jesus. Talk about unfair!

Meanwhile, inside the High Priest’s house, Jesus tells his interrogators that he has taught publicly and openly, and that they already know precisely what he has proclaimed; *and* they know in their hearts that his word is true! For this, he is struck across the face, spat upon, tied-up and taken-away to Pontus Pilate, the Roman governor. Pilate asks Jesus, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus calmly answers, “It is as you say.” Pilate says that he finds no guilt in him, so the chief priest and elders throw a new load of wild and false accusations at Jesus. However, Jesus doesn’t respond. And Pilate, sensing a stalemate, comes up with a plan: to beat and brutalize Jesus so badly that the people will have pity on him, and perhaps no longer demand his death. So the soldiers come, plant a crown of thorns on Jesus’ head, and whip him viciously. Yet the people still cry-out for his blood.

They take him to a hill called *Golgotha* - the Skull - on the outskirts town, and they crucify him between two condemned criminals. No real trial, no clear evidence of wrongdoing, no charges that would even begin to merit a death sentence. Yet throughout this entire process, Jesus Christ doesn't cry out, "This isn't fair!" He doesn't spew angry indignation or hatred; instead, he shows amazing forgiveness and love. And finally, at the end of an excruciating and humiliating public execution, Jesus says, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" - and then he breathes his final breath.

The Old Testament Prophet, Isaiah, in describing God's faithful servant of peace and righteousness says, "He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with sorrow; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was detested, and we held him to be of no account. Surely he has borne our frailties and carried our infirmities; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted....Yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By a perversion of justice he was taken away...although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit upon his lips."

How is any of that right? How can any of this be fair? I wish I had an answer, but I really don't. Like I

reminded our boys and girls last Sunday, we call the day that Jesus is killed “*Good Friday*”. It’s certainly not “*Fair Friday*” - because there’s absolutely nothing fair about it! So how can it be good? Apparently, tonight, God - like Jesus - remains silent.... On Easter morning, that silence will be broken.