

**A Sermon Preached by The Rev. Dn. Keith McKenna at St. Augustine's Church  
Good Friday, April 10, 2009**

**Isaiah 52: 13-53: 12; Psalm 22; Hebrews 10: 16-25; John 18: 1 - 19:42**

If you spend time in a monastery, as I like to do at least once every year, you quickly settle in to the cycles of monastic life, and prominent among these is the observance of the Daily Office, at appointed times each day. During the office the monks intone the psalms appointed for that day.

As the brothers chant the psalms you notice that after the first line of each verse they pause, and then go on. This arises from the way Hebrew poetry is conceived and constructed. Each first line is either a question or, broadly speaking, a thesis statement. Each next line is a response to the question, or a comment on the thesis.

The pause, marked in our text with an asterisk, is intended to give each reader a chance to absorb the substance of the first statement, so that one can be prepared to absorb the poet's response. How long is the pause to be? One medieval commentator said it should be at least the length of time it takes to initiate and complete a stitch in a piece of fabric, and you will find that asterisk so named in some guides to the psalms: The Stitch.

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

In the silence of the Stitch I am to try to empathize with the anguish of his cry into the darkness. Then perhaps I can understand his despair.

[stitch]

"And are so far from my cry  
And from the words of my distress."

God cannot hear the prayer of the supplicant.

"O my God I cry in the daytime, but you do not answer;"

[stitch]

"by night as well, but I find no rest."

Today is a day that cries out for the pause of the stitch. In the face of the enormity of what went on outside Jerusalem on this day 2000 years ago we have no choice but to pause if we are to absorb that enormity.

[stitch]

We have to pause again in contemplation of the enormity of what was then to come, two days later.

[stitch]

We have to pause to remember that for him, the ordained plan for his life on earth was made complete on that morning, but we also understand that it is not yet complete for us.

[stitch]

Pausing gives us time to do what Saint Benedict taught the monks to do when the chapel bell sounded: "Statio", he called it; "Be still; now is the time to let what has gone before be put away; only then can a poor monk be ready for what is to come next."

Be still.

Brother Curtis Almquist, Prior of the Society of St. James the Evangelist, writes: "Stay in the moment; there is a reason why today is not tomorrow."

In the face of that admonition, be still.

[stitch]

Today is the day when we try to visualize an act of unbounded cruelty, a crucifixion. Today we are to try to understand how fear and insecurity can make just people, in an unconsidered moment, behave unjustly. We are to stay in that moment, and be still, while we learn once more to forgive.

[stitch]

Barbara Johnson, a writer on Christian topics, says "We are Easter people living in a Good Friday World."

In the face of that teaching, be still.

[stitch]

Throughout this whole past year the harshness of Good Friday has continued everywhere. The excellent things that happened paled in comparison. We are apprehensive that we will awake tomorrow to hear of another act of violence in some marketplace somewhere, or in multiple somewheres, and all of them arising out of fear and insecurity.

As I'm speaking it's past 10 PM in Jerusalem. By then, 2020 years ago, his Good Friday was over.

Our Good Friday is not over, and will not soon be over. The best we can say is that in the season to come, the Easter Season, we will, as Easter people, continue to proclaim the Kingdom. We can hope, as Easter people, that on the day of Pentecost we will be ready to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit into our lives, and that in the long green season to follow we will continue to study, and learn, and act, in ways that glorify the Kingdom, so that when we come, on the edge of winter, to the season when we contemplate his Second Coming, we can find that we are ready.

We know, as Easter people, that we are to pray in that season that, if we are ordained to continue in the world, and into that season when we celebrate the gift of his first coming, we will understand the enormity of that gift;

We know, in the season that follows the nativity, that we will contemplate earnestly, as Easter people should, the meaning of his revelation of himself to the Apostles;

So that, when we come again to the 40 days, and to our preparation for the day of his resurrection, we can be intentional in our prayers, and be ready to receive anew, in his death and resurrection, the proclamation of the Kingdom.

We will be Easter people, but Good Friday will stay on. The same ignorance and cruelty that was the common character of the executioners will continue; the same fatuous excuse making will still be heard throughout the land; our hearts will be sorely tested.

But we have learned to pause. We know how to be still.

[stitch]

In the stillness we will know that we will have the great gift always before us;

[stitch]

We will know we will have the peace that comes to us despite the agony, because we are Easter people, cradled in the gift of the Resurrection.

[stitch]

Amen