

The garden! That's the place, his place. We're bound to find him there!

We begin, again, in the garden. And it is his place, his garden. Not that you'll find a deed anywhere that says this piece of real estate belongs to him; but it is his garden. "He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being." (1:2-3) All the gardens are his.

In the beginning, the Lord God came to the garden in the cool of the evening, to walk with the man and his wife. "Where are you?" God called. They were hiding, because they had begun to know who they were, small and naked creatures, and they were afraid. (Gen. 3:8-10)

These men now come to this garden, where Jesus is in charge. They are not afraid, not as afraid as they ought to be, not even knowing what they should be afraid of. He comes forward and asks,

"Whom are you looking for?"

"Jesus of Nazareth."

"I am he."

And they step back and fall to the ground. Still, they do not realize what they have gotten themselves into. They proceed to arrest Jesus, the Lord of the very ground on which they stand. They bind him and take him away.

And so it continues: Jesus is in command. What we heard here is the entire garden scene in John. There is no struggle, no prayer to the Father to remove the cup from him. The disciples do not desert him and flee; he directs the soldiers and police: ". . . let these men go." Judas has betrayed him, Peter denies him, but Jesus is never abandoned in John. His mother and the disciple whom he loves stand beside him at the foot of the cross.

He decides the moment of his death; when "it is finished," when he has accomplished his purpose; he bows his head and gives up his spirit. There is no need for affirmation at the end—no earthquake and splitting

rocks, no tearing of the curtain of the temple, no words of wonder from a Roman centurion. (Cf., Mt.27:51-54; Mk. 15:38-39; Lk.23:44-45)

Affirmation, glory, even, already have been openly given, even before the chief priests had activated their plan to put Jesus to death. It was when some Greeks in Jerusalem for the Passover came to Philip and said,

“Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” (12:20-21)

When Jesus heard it he said,

“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. . .
. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour?
No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour.
Father, glorify your name.’”

Then, a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and
I will glorify it again.” (12:27-28)

His hour has come. “The whole world” has come to him, in the person of these Greeks.

Jesus has chosen this hour. He has given himself to it. “I and the Father are one,” he has said. This is *his* will. There is no way to wax sentimental about his crucifixion in John.

The Jesus we see in John is the King. He is not condemned by the chief priests for saying he is God’s Son, or for saying he is the Messiah. (Cf., Mt. 26:63-65; Mk. 14:61-62; Lk. 22:66-71) In fact, there is no religious trial or condemnation at all in John. After questioning Jesus, the chief priests hand him over to Pilate without making any specific accusation, only, “If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you.” (18:30)

What we see played out here is a political contest: a confrontation between the powers of this world, and the power of God. And, truth be told, it is no contest at all. The fix is in, the outcome has been determined from the beginning.

These “authorities,” from the soldiers and police blown over by Jesus’ speaking the great name “I AM” in the garden, to Annas, Caiaphas, and

Pilate are buffoons, empty shells. They are like children playing at being in charge. "I am the daddy tonight," they proclaim at the dinner table, then take the daddy's seat and proceed to boss everybody else around, as long as the game lasts.

At the family dinner table, this is funny and fun, and a way of learning what it might feel like to preside over a family. The trouble is, the life of this world is not a game, and lots of people get hurt. When we play at being God, the results are brutal, disastrous, deadly. Rivers, oceans and bays are poisoned by run-off and refuse, and the life that is in them suffers, becomes toxic. The earth itself is torn apart to get at its treasures; it is also poisoned as we pour on more chemicals to make higher yields with an eye to higher profits. The ozone layer is eaten away, glaciers and polar ice caps melt at an alarming rate, islands and coastlands are threatened by rising waters. Cancers multiply.

There is endless war. In the 50-year reign of Caesar Augustus (44 B.C.-14 A.D.), the *Pax Romana*, there was less than one year, altogether, when Roman legions were not deployed somewhere in the empire. The empire maintains its power by brute force. The crucifixion of Jesus is the one on which the world focuses, to the extent crucifixion is thought about at all, but the Roman empire put thousands, hundreds of thousands, of others to this gruesome death, to control the people through fear and violence. The *Pax Romana*: what a sham.

"Are you the King of the Jews," asks the Roman governor.
"My kingdom is not from this world. . . ."

His kingdom is not *from* this world, but he *is* ruler *in* and *over* this world.

"So you are a king?"

“You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”

“What is truth?”

Pilate has not a clue, and never will. He is buried too deep in the ways of empire, the powers of this world, is too compromised. The religious authorities, too, are compromised by their own complicity with the ways of the empire. The chief priests themselves declare, quite shockingly, “We have no king but the emperor.” In their eagerness to see Jesus put to death, they seem to have forgotten all about Israel’s true king, YHWH, the great I AM. And they certainly have no inkling that their king is standing before them.

Once more, and as always, the powers of this world satisfy themselves that employing the full force of violence will secure their own safety. After the Greeks came looking for Jesus and the voice came from heaven, Jesus declared to the crowd standing there, “Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out.” (12:29, 31). But at the end of the day, neither Satan nor the rulers of this world appear to have been driven out; indeed, they appear to have won.

But wait a minute. How could this have happened? It is Jesus who truly is the King, Jesus who has been in command, of himself and all the others, from the beginning. He is one with the Father, is in the Father and the Father in him. “What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.” (1:3-4) And this life has been put to death by human will and human hands.

This is absolutely terrifying. John spares us any description of the crucifixion itself, but it is well known that it is a gruesome and shameful means of execution. What kind of God would choose this death; and how could we ever hope to approach one so other, so utterly above and beyond our narrow human capacity for love? Because that is what we are seeing here: the terrifying depths of God’s love for us in Jesus.

What we see in him on the cross we have seen before, last night, when he was at supper with his friends. He got up from the table, disrobed and

tied a towel around himself. Humbling himself, taking the part of a slave, he began to wash their feet.

As Peter exclaimed, saying aloud what all the others must have been feeling, it was a shameful thing to do. He was their Teacher and Lord. But, “Unless I wash you, you have no share with me,” Jesus said to Peter.

And now, this: to let himself be crucified, to actually intend for this happen because, he has said, it is in this being lifted up that he is glorified. He has promised that in this strange love there is a glory which is greater than any human glory, a power in this self-giving love that will prove to be far greater than all the force and violence the powers of this world can muster.

Joseph and Nicodemus have wrapped his body in linen cloths and spices fit for a royal burial. They have laid him in the tomb, in a garden. And we are hoping against hope that it will prove a very promising place.