

Inside the city wall they would have heard the shouting before they could see what was happening, who was coming. “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.” “Who is this?” they all asked. The whole city was in an uproar.

When Jesus came, at last, to Jerusalem, the center of Israel’s worship and power, it all looked like triumph to the ones coming with him. But to the ones inside the walls, it was all turmoil and fear. Maybe where we stand and what we are looking for colors what we do see, with the eyes of the heart.

But how confusing this still turns out to be, when even those closest to Jesus are not able to see. Later that week, in the garden, Gethsemane, his three closest companions—Peter, James and John—could not even bear to look. “Keep awake. . . . Watch with me.” Three times Jesus asked them. But their eyes were heavy, and closed, unseeing. They could not look on him, wracked with grief and dread as he was. They had seen themselves as heroes earlier that night; had meant to be brave and to go with him, even to death, all of them. Yet, all of them deserted him, as he had known and said they would.

Even Peter, who had been the most vocal and determined. He followed Jesus when he was arrested, “to see how it would end.” As if he could have just looked on from a safe distance; as if there could be a safe distance from Jesus for a disciple, watching, but not involved. Inevitably, Peter was seen and recognized. Confusion and fear took him over, too. *With Jesus? One of them? No way!* Three times Peter denied he even knew him. When the cock crowed, he came to his own bitter recognition of himself: no different from the others, no different from the rest of us. Deeply in need of repentance and forgiveness. As he and the others would finally see, deeply in need of the astounding, free gift of the cross.

One of the twelve, though, did not live to see what was won by the cross. We don’t know what Judas had thought he was up to, why he betrayed Jesus. It certainly wasn’t for the money; 30 shekels was a pittance. He might as well have done it/betrayed Jesus for nothing. But when he saw that Jesus was condemned—When he saw that Jesus was *condemned?! Well, he must have looked for something quite different to happen in the beginning, or not really understood what it would mean for Jesus to be condemned. In that, he was as muddled and confused in his own way as almost everybody else in Jerusalem at the time, friend of Jesus or foe! Insider with Jesus, or insider in Jerusalem.*

When he saw that Jesus was condemned, Judas repented. But when he confessed his sin to the chief priests and the elders—“I have sinned by betraying innocent blood”—they could not have cared less. He was looking in the wrong place for absolution. What was done was done, and would not be undone. Things would move on inexorably to the intended conclusion.

Of the one who would betray him, Jesus had said, “It would have been better for that one not to have been born. His words must have echoed in Judas’ own heart, the echo drowning out Jesus’ words of hope that had followed, over the cup: “Drink from it, *all* of you; for this is my blood . . . poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” Judas had drunk from the cup with the others, but now, overwhelmed by grief and guilt, he could not see hope or imagine that the gift of forgiveness could be for him.

When the religious insiders in Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders, looked at Jesus, they knew what they were seeing: a liar and a blasphemer, an insult to the living God—and to themselves—a man who had to die. They could not imagine any reality, see any truth other than their own. They already had decided that Jesus had to die. Having no case against him based on what he had taught openly in the temple (as he himself said), they looked for *false* testimony against him. Even that was a long time coming.

In the end they did condemn him, handed him over to the Roman governor, saw him crucified, dead, and buried. Still, they could not feel secure, afraid he would not stay put in the grave. They knew quite well what he had said “while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise again.’” So they made the tomb as secure as they could, by sealing the stone. Just as they believed they had been in control of what had happened already, they imagined they could control what might happen next.

At the Roman trial, Pilate had had all the information he needed: his own good judgment, and even a message from God. He saw no evil in Jesus. Was warned by his wife’s dream, and her message, “Have nothing to do with that innocent man.” We know about dreams in Matthew, the dreams of Joseph and the wise men that protected Jesus at the time of his birth. But there was no protecting Jesus now, not even through a dream.

Pilate looked away, he dis-regarded what was plainly before him, that Jesus was innocent. He was caught between the reality he saw—an innocent man condemned—and the reality that appeared more compelling: that a riot was beginning, the city in turmoil again. The shouts rang out, not hosannas now, but “Let him be crucified!” What Pilate finally “saw” was “that he could do nothing,” nothing for Jesus, nothing for truth.

There was only misjudgment, confusion and turmoil all the way through to the end. Jesus was the only person who could see everything clearly, even as it all swirled around him. From the first, on the Mount of Olives, looking down on Jerusalem; in the garden where he chose his Father’s will, not his own; on trial before the Jewish leaders, and then before Pilate. Even on the cross. Only Jesus did not draw back in confusion or fear. Only he was not caught up in the turmoil, even as he was the focal point of it all.

“Hail, King of the Jews!” the soldiers mocked him. “If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross,” taunted those who passed by. It was plain to them he could not be King, Messiah, or Son of God, or what would he be doing on a cross? It was plain to him that he could not be King, Messiah, Son of God *unless* he was on the cross. Seeing through and beyond what was happening, he had let himself be handed over. Did not resist, knowing he must be forsaken even by God. So he did not come down, any

more than he had turned stones into bread, or thrown himself down from the pinnacle of the temple.

It was only afterwards that others began to see what he knew all along: that under, beyond, and even through the confusion, suffering and fear, God was at work bringing about the most astounding, unimaginable good: a work of love and redemption that, despite all appearances to the contrary, did not and does not end in death or the grave but presses on into life, even eternal life in the kingdom of God.