

The most appropriate response to what we have just witnessed may well be silence: stunned, awed silence. We are invited in this week to meditate on the crucified Jesus: the innocent one, the only one of us who ever lived entirely as God intends and desires.

*In your infinite love, you made us for yourself.*

*You made us the rulers of creation.*

*But we turned against you, and betrayed your trust; and we turned against one another.*

Every week we are reminded of the problem: God's love; humans' alienation from God and one another. Every week we are reminded of God's shocking and incongruous solution: Jesus, God's Anointed put to death by hanging on a tree.

Rather than meditate on the Crucifixion, we might rather turn away, close our eyes, stop our ears and wait for Easter: no confusion and disorientation; or, at least, only happy disorientation and confusion. no sudden reversal except the reversal from sorrow to joy.

But if we look upon Jesus on the cross, through the eyes of Luke, what might we see?

Jesus, the one who is innocent, who is entirely whole, who *is* all the goodness of God and all the goodness of Man: Betrayed. Seized like a common criminal. Mocked. Beaten. Spat upon.

Lied about by people who twist his words and actions, whose only object is his death, that he might trouble them no more. Wrongly condemned against the court's—Pilate's—own finding that there is no evidence against him deserving death. Crucified as a criminal in the place of Barabbas, a murderer who really had incited rebellion against the empire.

Of course, it was all going this way from the start. All this was, and is, the point: scandal; outrage, offense. He *is* a scandal, an outrage, an offense. He is the righteous one. He shows us God. He shows us what we were made to be; what we may become: the good in ourselves that we betray, deny, abandon when we choose against God, against our neighbor, against our true self—the self that will be restless until it rests in God.

He became to us a reproof of our thoughts;  
the very sight of him is a burden to us,  
because his manner of life is unlike that of others,  
and his ways are strange.

The Wisdom of Solomon 1:14-15

He stands alone before his accusers. Even Peter, who has followed him to the courtyard of the high priest's house and meant to follow him even to prison and death; even Peter denies he ever knew him.

Not only the chief priests and leaders denounce Jesus to Pilate, but the people, too, the crowds who flocked to hear him, whom he taught, healed and fed. With one voice priests, leaders and people cry out, "Crucify, crucify him!" repeatedly, urgently, with loud shouts, until they prevail.

What *is* this? Why do we human beings do this? We have been very close to this kind of hostility and hatred in Washington just this past week. Invective, insults and spitting; racism and homophobia; Congressional leaders leading chants of "Kill the bill!" still ring in our ears.

Then came death threats: a gas line cut, a coffin left on a lawn, a drawing of a noose sent by fax. And then the accusations about who was using what in the whole ugly business for political advantage. It has been terrifying, as if we were on the brink of bloodshed. Not only because of the words and actions, which were bad enough; but because of the naked, unmasked rage, hostility and hatred that were revealed. We pray for sanity and calm for everyone involved.

This is not about Republicans and Democrats. This is something far deeper in us human beings than political affiliation, deeper than philosophy or beliefs. It is something that haunts us and can make us mad and murderous, in heart and word, if not in action. It is an impulse, a compulsion, to drive out or destroy what is "not like us," born of our fear of the stranger; a fear that may lie not very far under the surface, and be triggered by any number of things that matter a lot, or even not very much.

One who is different, not from here, not one of us, unknown, *might* be a physical threat. Even if not, just by being different such a one may be a threat to our identity, the sense we have of ourselves as normative, as being "the real thing," the standard against which all else is measured.

Either kind of threat can evoke our deeper fear of death—not physical death only, but the fear that we are disregarded, could be erased, count for nothing. All this, when the truth is none of us, and no party, race, gender or group is normative, the real thing, the standard; but only the image of God in all of us.

What do we see when we look now on Jesus? We see the one who, though he is a human being (*who lived and died as one of us*) is not afraid of the other; not afraid even of the devil or of death; who does not distance himself from God or from any human being. Who in the upper room bestows on his disciples a kingdom.

Who on his way to the cross  
heals the severed ear of the high priest's slave, in the garden;  
turns *toward* Peter after Peter denies three times that he knows him or was with him;  
has compassion on the women who weep for him.

We see him on the cross  
asking forgiveness for those reject, condemn and put him to death; and  
welcoming into his kingdom a criminal who now recognizes his own sin and Jesus' innocence.

We see him healing sinners to the last.

And as we look on him, we see also what we fear in ourselves, and about ourselves, all our unloveliness, when we, too, were made to be lovely. In the mirror of his calm confidence, we see our own fear. In his healing, we see our brokenness, how much we are in need of healing. In his forgiveness, we see our hostility and alienation, and our deep need to be forgiven.

Silence hardly seems an appropriate response now. Better the response of the crowds who gathered to see the spectacle who, when they see what has taken place, return home, beating their breasts. The same crowds who shouted "Crucify!" are overwhelmed now by self-recognition and sorrow.

As he hangs on the cross, he sees everything. He has seen us at our worst, doing our worst; and still he loves us, even *so*. His love and forgiveness embrace even our sin, our alienation and hostility and the sin of the whole world. Its power dies with him on the cross. He embraces our fear in his outstretched arms of love.

Our hearts are broken open—with sorrow, with joy, with wonder. We are stunned; we are in awe.