

Devotion Week of April 24, 2022 – Second Week of Eastertide
Rev. Jeanne Simpson

He will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken.

Isaiah 25:8

I went to see “Jesus Christ Superstar” at the Fox Sunday afternoon. I saw it before some years ago, but forgot that it starts right before Jesus enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. There is a great deal of frenzy in the crowd in the beginning scene, with someone who clearly seems possessed in the midst of them. This “possessed” woman reappears periodically throughout the musical, especially when evil forces like Caiaphas and Annas show up, or Pilate appears. The tone is very dark and evil is always lurking around Jesus. He seems tired and frustrated throughout the entire play – with the people who don’t seem to understand his ministry, with his disciples who can’t stay awake while he prays, and, of course, at Judas. When Caiaphas presents Judas with a chest of money, Judas puts his hands in it and comes up with them covered in silver paint, that won’t rub off, in spite of Judas’ best efforts. Only Mary Magdalene seems positive, and she repeatedly sings of calm – “Everything’s Alright” – and when she does that, the crowd of followers around Jesus or Jesus himself becomes quiet and rests.

The play made me think about the story of Jesus’ last days on earth. It ends with Jesus laid in the tomb on Friday afternoon in silence. There is no resurrection in this performance. Frenzied requests for healing and better days are followed by nasty plots to kill Jesus. Pilate three times comes out and tries to get the crowd and the High Priests to change their minds about murdering Jesus. But there is clearly a lynch mob around, and it will not reconsider. Pilate finally gives in and leaves the stage in disgust.

The horror of that last week in Jerusalem was brought home to me in new ways. It reminded me of why we try to end a Good Friday service in silence and remain in that silence throughout the Saturday Vigil. Because Jesus was truly condemned and crucified in the manner that this play portrayed. It wasn’t pretty, it wasn’t glorious, it was just plain, outright, unjustified murder.

I am deeply grateful for Easter Sunday, and for this season when we can celebrate the fact that the lynch mob didn’t win, the High Priests didn’t win, Judas didn’t win, and the forces of evil didn’t win. He rose, and that is our inheritance as people of God. Alleluia.

Jeanne