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Isaiah 52: 13 – 53: 12  
 Hebrews 10: 16 – 25

Psalm 22  
 John 18: 1 – 19: 42

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**“After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered.”**

Today, Good Friday, begins in a garden and ends in a trash dump. Our theme, our frame of reference for these last forty days, has been ‘Lent as Creation Care.’ So, today’s journey in John mimics our own journey. It’s the story of where we began, in a garden, and the road that we’ve been traveling for some time in this world. It’s the story of what we have done to this glorious Creation with which God has blessed us. During these forty days, we have continually asked ourselves, ‘how are we doing as stewards of Creation, as the ones to whom God has entrusted all the birds of the air, the fish of the sea and every living thing?’ And the answer seems to be staring back at us from the cross. We have done poorly. Or to put it in more theological terms, we have sinned and fallen short. Way short.

John’s story begins in the evening on a hillside, across a narrow valley that separates it from the walled city of Jerusalem. The hillside is known as the Mount of Olives because of the groves of gnarled trees, with their characteristic small, gray-green leaves, and tiny purple and green fruits, that cover the slopes. The garden itself, where Jesus and his friends gather, is known as Gethsemane, which means oil vat, or oil press. It is where the gathered fruit is brought to be pressed and squeezed until its life-blood, the olive oil, is released and poured into waiting earthen jugs. The garden is a place where Jesus and his disciples are used to meeting. Perhaps it is the breeze on the hilltop. Perhaps it is the heady odor of the olive oil wafting in the air. Perhaps it is just the relative green lushness apart from the buildings and roads and walls of the city. Up until now, it has been a restful retreat and an open-air classroom. But that is all about to change. The sacred space of the garden is about to be violated with violence.

There is, of course, another story of a garden that is the backdrop for John’s story. Way back in the Garden of Eden, God comes walking in the cool of the evening, just as God always does. God comes looking for the man and the woman because they are all used to spending time together, face to face. God calls for them, but there is no answer, only an echoing, reverberating call that goes unanswered. The man and the woman are in hiding. Something bad has happened, something that has completely soured and spoiled the relationship. Where once the heavenly scent of tea olive drifted in the early evening air, there is now only the foul smell of something destroyed and rotting, like bad fruit. It is made worse by the lies, the excuses, the blaming, that follow. The Garden has been violated, the love that created it – trampled upon. Life in all its fullness has been destroyed and something quite precious has been lost.

In our Creation Care, or rather lack thereof, we are the ones who have created the fetid mess of our environment. We are the ones seemingly hell bent on destroying life in its fullness through our careless, capricious and copious consumption. We are the ones who appear to be either completely oblivious, or perhaps completely indifferent, to the loss of all that is precious. We are the ones who have chosen the values of this world over and against habitats and animals, safe drinking water and clean air. We are the ones who wantonly take a bite out of every piece of fruit, casting the rest of it aside and moving on to the next one, leaving a trail of waste in our wake. We are the ones who point fingers at everyone else for wreaking havoc and devastation upon Creation, but fail to take into account, or too readily excuse, our own actions. We are the ones who have violated the Garden, trampled the love which brought it into being, and seem bent on pressing and squeezing every last drop of life blood out of it for our own use.

As we gather at the foot of the cross this day, caught up in both its horror and its beauty, we stare upon the crucified body of Jesus, through whom all things were made and without whom not one thing has come into being. On this day, we come face to face with the consequences of our brokenness, and we cannot help but see how we are also crucifying Creation. Today, we pray that the world might be saved through you, Lord Jesus, and by that world, we mean not just us human beings, but ALL of creation.

For now, we kneel among the rotting corpses, dung heaps and detritus of the garbage dump in which Jesus hangs. We kneel surrounded by the consequences of our choices and actions. For now, with the man and the woman, expelled from the Garden of Eden, we watch and weep. For now, we cling to the cross, holding on for dear life, much like this fragile earth, our island home is doing. For now, we wait and wonder, not yet realizing the fullness of God's redemption, God's presence, God's love and grace and forgiveness. We are blessed to know that the cross is not the end of the story, that something so far beyond our wildest dreams is yet to come, that all hope is not lost, that in three short days, a gardener will appear who will make all things new. On this day, despite all evidence to the contrary, our trust is not misplaced. And that is why it is GOOD Friday.

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