Text: Luke 23:26-56

**Text**

I love the gospel of Luke. There are a bunch of reasons. But one of them is gems like this. “And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts.”

It is that word translated spectacle. 1 Corinthians 4:9 is the only other use of a similar word. “For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. (1 Cor. 4:9 ESV).” They are both associated with the greek theater. I don’t know if anybody has even been to Oberammergau, but a Passion Play might actually be biblical. And that Greek theater had two modes: tragedy and comedy. The point of a Greek tragedy was that the audience, through the death of a morally ambiguous character, might find catharsis. What is catharsis? A purging of negative emotions such those who experienced it might have a greater fellow feeling. The tragedies were political events. They were put on to bring the polis closer together. The comedy’s intent was to highlight the failures of a society. But unlike the tragedy which was unavoidable because it was fated, the comedy could be addressed. And a true comedy always ended in a wedding. The hope for the future.

Luke tells us that the people had assembled for the spectacle. The question is what did they expect? A tragedy or a comedy. Were they witnessing the death of a morally ambiguous fated man such that they could all weep together? Or were they witnessing something in themselves that could be addressed…with maybe a wedding in the future?

And Luke, as he so often does throughout his gospel, gives us pairs. There are the Daughters of Jerusalem who in some sense understood the failure that had led to this point. And Jesus I think gives us a clue to the spectacle. If you think I’m in the tragedy, think again. “Weep not for me, for yourselves weep.” This mournful way – this Via Dolorosa – is the seal on the fate of the city. “The days are coming when they will say ‘blessed are the barren…”. Which would the the AD70 fall of the city.

And those Daughters of Jerusalem are paired with the rulers who “scoffed at him, “he saved others; let him save himself.” The men who thought that this was all a comedy and they were fixing one of those problems.

There are two sets of legionaries. You have those who gambled for his clothing and joined in the mockery offering him sour wine and petitioning the King of the Jews. And then the centurion who witnessed the final words of Jesus who praised God and said “certainly this man was innocent.” The players in a comedy are innocents, trapped in a system that twists things. The dead man in the tragedy deserved his fate.

There are the two criminals. The one who joins in the mockery. And the one who thinks this might not be the final act. “Jesus, remember me, when you come into your Kingdom.”

And then maybe there is the strange pair of Simon of Cyrene and Joseph of Arimathea. Simon from the country forced to carry the cross. Joseph a member of the council who asks for the remains from the cross. It is these two who witness the entire spectacle.

Who sees the spectacle rightly? The women, the centurion, the thief on the right. The rulers, the legionaries, the thief on the left. The crowds witnessed the spectacle and went home beating their breasts. They through they had witnessed a tragedy. This poor Jesus. So much hope. What wanders he had done. But it must have been hubris. He must have trespassed God to end like this. What a sad fate. The gods preserve us from such a fate.

But the women, and the acquaintances, and Joseph, did not join them. They took it like the Day of Preparation that it was. But preparation for what?

**Application**

The church’s testimony is that this is the Divine Comedy. The passion of Jesus is not the fated end of an ambiguous character. It is the terrible culminating act of all our sin. We take his kingship as a joke. Except for the thief who has the audacity to ask the king. The legion take his claims as proof of treason – “the King of the Jews” is the charge against him. The centurion knows his kingdom was not of this world.

We can be like Simon and have carried the cross. We can be like Joseph and have looked for the Kingdom. Seeing this spectacle. What have wee seen? Have we seen the divine comedy? God addressing our sins, giving hope for the future – “Father forgive them.” Ending in a wedding? The marriage feast of the lamb?

What are we carrying crosses for? What are we preparing for?

Are we beating breasts in catharsis that we have survived this hour? That it was not our fate so we can have fellow feeling of escape for a time? Or are we awaiting what God does next. Do we have the hope of paradise?

Was the spectacle for us just another tragedy, or was it the Divine Comedy addressing all our failures? Do you have your invite to the wedding feast?