

But Jesus Made No Reply
A Meditation on Isaiah 42:1-4
and Matthew 27:11-31

Presented to Central Union Church
by Kent M. Keith
Honolulu, Hawaii
Good Friday
April 20, 1984

But Jesus made no reply.

But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of the governor.

Why did Jesus make no reply? He came to Earth to be the Way and the Truth and the Life; He had shown God's love, healing and teaching; He brought new life and hope to thousands. Now, standing before Pilate, He is being accused by the chief priests and the elders. These are false accusations, but He does not defend himself; He does not reply. Why?

We remember his power and the anger of his attack on the money-changers in the Temple; we remember the parables which put hypocrites in place. In a society like ours, today, which is so fond of litigation, in which everyone can have their day in court, in which courtroom dramas fill the airwaves and printed media, we want our Christ, God made flesh, to have his day in court, to make his defense, to persuade Pilate, or at least humiliate the chief priests and elders. But Jesus made no reply.

I do not know why. I do not know why he made no reply. But I offer a few thoughts for meditation.

First, what would He have said? What would He have said that He had not already said? What would He have said that he had not already said to these very same chief priests and elders? It was what He had *already* said that led to the accusations, the condemnation, the fear in the eyes and hearts of the church leaders. His words and deeds, his miracles and healings, had not touched them with joy and love, but with fear and hate. They did not want to be reached. They wanted to shut God out.

Second, is fear and hate something that one can debate? Is it something that God can debate? God is love, and offers joy; the chief priests and elders were filled with hate, and offered fear. This is not an argument about the law or the facts; this is not a matter of proof or evidence. The evidence was clear: Jesus was the Christ; Jesus is the Christ. It would seem odd for God made flesh to stand before hate and fear, and try to defend love and joy, or list his many accomplishments and community contributions, as though He had been caught committing a crime and wished generous treatment. How could Christ throw himself upon the mercy of the court, when the court should be throwing itself upon the mercy of Christ?

Third, silence *is* a response. Silence leaves the echo of the speaker's words. It forces the speaker to hear his own words. In a debate, the first person speaks; and while he is speaking, the second person is preparing his response, not really listening; and back and forth it goes. But when there is no reply, there is only the hollow echo of what the first speaker has said. The false accusations echoed in the hall. The silence was like a mirror. Listen to what you have said! Do you hear the fear and hate in your own voices? Is that what you want for yourselves—fear and hate instead of love and joy? Stand in front of the mirror, see your words come back to you in the silence, look at yourselves!

Pilate was amazed. In the silence, he began to ponder. Because of the silence, there was nothing else to do, but ponder. There were no words from Christ to debate. The issue was who He was. "Are you the king of the Jews?" Pilate had asked him. "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus responded. And then, silence. In the silence, it began to sink in. Pilate began to waiver.

Fourth, goodness is a threat. Most human beings want to be good; and most of know that we are not. If people can accept the goodness of Christ, and begin the journey toward the perfection that God wants for each of us, then the threat is gone. But if a person does not accept Christ, then the goodness of Christ is only a reminder of human failing, weakness, and wickedness. Compared with evil, we feel that we are pretty good; compared with good, we feel rather evil. And so the crowd, stirred up by the church leaders, chooses Barabbas and condemns Jesus. Barabbas may have been a murderer, or political revolutionary, or thief—it doesn't matter. A bad person is less threatening to the psyche and spirit of people who wish to think of themselves as good. Let Barabbas go free. He might murder one of us, but he will not make us feel inadequate; he will not disturb us into true spiritual growth; he won't bring us face to face with our wickedness. Christ *will* do that. Christ *is* the threat. "Crucify him!" they shouted.

Fifth, Jesus knew that the betrayal, the beating, the false accusations, and the crucifixion were part of God's plan. This was not a court case Christ was supposed to win; it was not a crowd that He was supposed to persuade. In Isaiah it says: "He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets." He was on his way to the ultimate sacrifice. That was God's will.

The crucifixion would have been enough suffering. But why the betrayal, the desertion of Peter, the beating, the false accusations and sham trial, the murderous crowd, the mockery of the soldiers, the crown of thorns? Why was He spit on? Why was all this part of God's plan?

I don't know. But I will guess.

It is an ugly story. Vividly before our eyes are all the worst traits found in human beings. Etched against the history of our planet is this awful example of the power of fear and hate in the lives of men. And it is worse than an example of "man's inhumanity to man." It is man's inhumanity to God made flesh—to the Christ. It is a painful, searing reminder of how bad we can be.

It is an ugly story. Why? Because we need to remember, always, at every moment, how ugly we can be without God's love; we need to be reminded for all time of our need for Christ, to free us from the hate and fear which were so present in so many hearts on that Good Friday so long ago.

Easter is about the power and love of God; Good Friday is about the weakness and wickedness of man. Easter is about salvation; Good Friday is about the desperate need for salvation.

Jesus made no reply. In silence he watched men at their worst; He watched evil triumph in their hearts.

Then He made his reply. He gave his life for them.