

There's a moment in the Passion story that always catches me. It's not just what the crowd says, though that is breath-catching enough. It's how quickly it changes.

One day, "*Hosanna!*" A few days later, "*Crucify him!*"

And I always wonder what happened in between. Did they all just up and change their minds? Did new people show up? Or was it simply that the loudest voices shifted, and suddenly it sounded like everyone agreed?

Because that's how crowds work, isn't it? It doesn't take much. One strong opinion, said loudly enough, repeated enough, and suddenly everyone else starts to wonder if they missed something. Before long, you find yourself nodding along, not entirely sure when you decided to change your mind. And the loudest voices begin to feel like the truest ones, and the most confident and insistent voices begin to shape the story, until something takes hold that feels almost inevitable.

If you were standing there that day, you might have believed the crowd. You might have thought, well, this must be how it ends. Everything about that moment points in one direction. The empire has spoken. The religious leaders have decided. The crowd is in agreement.

And Jesus is silent. Or nearly silent.

And when he does speak, it's not to defend himself or correct the narrative. Instead, we hear that cry, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*"

And if we're honest, that sounds like silence from heaven. No answer. No rescue. Just quiet.

And I think this is where Good Friday becomes more than a story, because most of us know something about that kind of silence. We know what it is to pray and not hear anything back, to hope for clarity and get nothing, to sit in a moment that feels like it is unraveling and wonder where God has gone.

We don't have to imagine that part of the cross. We've lived versions of it. Hospital rooms. Grief that doesn't resolve. Addiction that doesn't magically disappear. Relationships that break even when we've done everything we know how to do.

I've had moments as a priest where I've walked into a situation and thought, I have no idea what to say here. No wisdom, no fix, no way to make this better. And everything in me wants to come up with something, to fill the space, to say the right words.

But more and more, I have learned that sometimes the most faithful thing is just to sit down... and stay.

There are moments when the world feels very loud, full of opinions and certainty and noise, and God feels very quiet.

So, the question becomes, is heaven really silent? Or is something else happening?

Holocaust survivor, Elie Wiesel, tells of a moment in a concentration camp when a child is executed, and someone asks, *"Where is God?"* The answer that comes back is not comforting. It is, *"Here he is, hanging."*

It's a hard answer. But it's a Good Friday answer, because it suggests that if God is anywhere in that moment, it is not far away or watching from a distance. It is right there, in the suffering, in the humiliation, in the cross itself.

And then there are the ones who stay.

While the crowd shouts and everything seems to collapse, a few do not leave. The women. The beloved disciple. They don't change the outcome. They don't even say much. They just stay.

Dorothy Day once said, *"If you want to find God, you don't look up, you look around. You look for the ones who are suffering, and the ones who refuse to leave them."*

And with the presence of those who refuse to leave, the ones who stay, the scene takes on new shape.

*The crowd is still loud. Heaven still seems quiet. But maybe heaven is not absent.*

Heaven is right there; there in the one on the cross, and there in the ones who stay.

And maybe this is the only thing we can say about Good Friday.

*The crowd was loud. Heaven was quiet. And still, love stayed.*

By every measure we usually use, this looks like failure. The movement collapses. The disciples scatter. The powers of the world win. There is no way to spin a cross into success.

And yet, love does not fail. This is the defining truth woven through the silence and chaos: love stays.

Jesus does not stop loving. Jesus does not stop forgiving. Jesus does not leave. Even here.

So maybe the question isn't whether this is failure. Maybe the question is what love does when everything else falls apart.

It doesn't shout. It doesn't overpower. It doesn't necessarily win the argument in the moment. It stays. Love stays.

*The crowd was loud. Heaven was quiet. And still, love stayed.*

Which means that when the voices around us shift, when heaven feels silent, when everything in our time looks like it is unraveling, the invitation of Good Friday is to stay.

To stay with one another. To stay with those who are hurting. To stay in love when it would be easier to walk away.

Because somehow, that is where God is.

*The crowd was loud. Heaven was quiet. And still, love stayed.*

And maybe, just maybe, that is not the absence of God.

That is the presence of a love that will never walk away from us.

Amen.