

The Crucifixion
By James Weldon Johnson

Jesus, my gentle Jesus,
Walking in the dark of the Garden --
The Garden of Gethsemane,
Saying to the three disciples:
Sorrow is in my soul --
Even unto death;
Tarry ye here a little while,
And watch with me.

Jesus, my burdened Jesus,
Praying in the dark of the Garden --
The Garden of Gethsemane.
Saying: Father,
Oh, Father,
This bitter cup,
This bitter cup,
Let it pass from me.
Jesus, my sorrowing Jesus,
The sweat like drops of blood upon his brow,
Talking with his Father,
While the three disciples slept,
Saying: Father,
Oh, Father,
Not as I will,
Not as I will,
But let thy will be done.
Oh, look at black-hearted Judas --
Sneaking through the dark of the Garden --
Leading his crucifying mob.
Oh, God!
Strike him down!
Why don't you strike him down,
Before he plants his traitor's kiss
Upon my Jesus' cheek?
And they take my blameless Jesus,
And they drag him to the Governor,
To the mighty Roman Governor.
Great Pilate seated in his hall,--
Great Pilate on his judgment seat,

Said: In this man I find no fault.
I find no fault in him.
And Pilate washed his hands.

But they cried out, saying:
Crucify him!--
Crucify him!--
Crucify him!--
His blood be on our heads.
And they beat my loving Jesus,
They spit on my precious Jesus;
They dressed him up in a purple robe,
They put a crown of thorns upon his head,
And they pressed it down --
Oh, they pressed it down --
And they mocked my sweet King Jesus.

Up Golgotha's rugged road
I see my Jesus go.
I see him sink beneath the load,
I see my drooping Jesus sink.
And then they laid hold on Simon,
Black Simon, yes, black Simon;
They put the cross on Simon,
And Simon bore the cross.
On Calvary, on Calvary,
They crucified my Jesus.
They nailed him to the cruel tree,
And the hammer!
The hammer!
The hammer!
Rang through Jerusalem's streets.
The hammer!
The hammer!
The hammer!
Rang through Jerusalem's streets.

Jesus, my lamb-like Jesus,
Shivering as the nails go through his hands;
Jesus, my lamb-like Jesus,
Shivering as the nails go through his feet.

Jesus, my darling Jesus Mary,

Weeping Mary,

Sees her poor little Jesus on the cross.

Mary,

Weeping Mary,

Sees her sweet, baby Jesus on the cruel cross,

Hanging between two thieves.

And Jesus, my lonesome Jesus,

Called out once more to his Father,

Saying:

My God,

My God,

Why hast thou forsaken me?

And he drooped his head and died.

(There was no)groaning as the Roman spear plunged in his side;

Jesus, my darling Jesus,

The blood and water came pouring from his wound.

Oh, look how they done my Jesus.

And the veil of the temple was split in two,

The midday sun refused to shine,

The thunder rumbled and the lightning wrote

An unknown language in the sky.

What a day! Lord, what a day!

When my blessed Jesus died.

Oh, I tremble, yes, I tremble,

It causes me to tremble, tremble,

When I think how Jesus died;

Died on the steps of Calvary,

How Jesus died for sinners,

Sinners like you and me.

“Worthy of Suffering for the Name”
+ Easter 2 – Year C +
Acts 5:27-41; Revelation 1:4-8; John 20:19-31

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! AMEN The texts for this morning’s message are the lessons for this day.

To focus our thoughts on the lessons for this day I’m going to begin with a dramatic reading of a sermon in the style of the African Slave Preachers of the Civil War and Reconstruction period by poet and author James Weldon Johnson who had heard them as a child.

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Calvary? How did we get back to Calvary on this “Little Easter” – the day of “Doubting Thomas?” As I read the lessons for this Second Easter they tied together in a most unique way. In Revelation we hear the words so powerfully put to music by Paul and Ruth Manz, “Grace be to you and peace from Him who saved us from our sin. Who loved us all and shed His blood that we might be saved!” In Acts the disciples are on trial before the Sanhedrin and after they are flogged (a horrible beating that Romans called the “half –death” because so many people died shortly thereafter)- after they are flogged the Apostles don’t go skulking off to nurse their bleeding wounds, no, “they rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name.” And then there’s Thomas – how could he believe that Jesus who had suffered the most horrible of deaths, whose hands and feet had been nailed to the cross, whose side had been pierced – how could he believe that Jesus was risen from the dead unless he saw those fatal wounds and witnessed for himself that Jesus was, indeed risen from the dead? Blood, suffering, death and being worthy to suffer for the name of God that they had never been able to speak for fear of breaking the 2nd commandment - the name they now could speak simply by saying Jeshua/Jesus – what ties the lessons together for this day is the incomprehensible reality of the resurrection in light of the unbelievable cost of our salvation: the suffering and death of God-made-flesh.

And yet, in the midst of this sacrifice and suffering come words of peace: “Peace be to you” are the first words of Jesus to the huddled horde of hiding disciples and they are also the words Jesus leaves them with that Easter evening. “Peace be to you as He breathes the breath of the Holy Spirit on them.” When next Jesus comes into their midst those words are spoken again, “Peace be to you” – peace because the slain yet risen One they saw before them and the reality of God before them was so unsettling – so troubling to sinful human beings. God had been present with them in Jesus throughout their years together but veiled in human flesh – now that veil has been removed and His new, heavenly body revealed.

Do you think you would have demanded evidence like Thomas? Would you have hidden in fear of what this would mean for your life? I believe I would have and I pray I would have had the same response Thomas “the Doubter,” did who simply said the truth, “My Lord, and my God!”

It’s all there, in those words – the Creed – Jesus is God – something you can only know by the power of the Holy Spirit. That took some getting used to. Sometime later after their beating – long before those who followed Jesus were called “Christians” – perhaps before they were even called those who followed “the Way” (another name for Jesus – the Way, the Truth and the Life) the Apostles are honored to suffer, to be shamed in a public beating, for the sake of “the name” – the name of Jesus at whose name “every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that He is Lord.”

How casually we treat the name of God today. How often don’t we hear the precious name of Jesus used as an epithet. How much do we suffer for following Jesus today? I’m not talking about the pinch on the pocketbook that contributions to the ministry of this or any church brings. In a society where even some who call themselves Christians will tell you that since Jesus died for all there are many paths to heaven just by different names and Christian witness means to be involved in social justice for all – is it really necessary to tremble in fear before the greatness of God, to marvel that the Word became Flesh and was sacrificed for our sins – do we really need to proclaim freedom from sin and salvation through Jesus Christ alone?

Oh yes – because that is the Good News we have been given – and ridicule for this simple faith may follow. But the world so desperately needs the message the Holy Spirit has breathed into our hearts through the gift of faith in the washing waters of salvation - to proclaim that there is forgiveness for all sins in Jesus and life eternal only through His name... Jesus who suffered and died on the day

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Died on the steeps of Calvary,
Jesus died for sinners,
Sinners like you and me. AMEN