

God and Suffering

The years following Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection were troublesome times for those living in Palestine. War between the Jews and Rome resulted in the destruction of the temple in 70 CE; Jews belonging to the new cult - Christianity - were expelled from synagogues as Roman persecution extended its tentacles of fear and destruction into the newly formed Christian communities. The gospel accounts of Jesus' life were written into these tumultuous times. The gospel for this Sunday (Mark 6:14-29) is a strange lesson. John the Baptist, who strides into the beginning of Mark to introduce us to Jesus, is now in prison. Mark is now giving us detailed information about Herod's marital problems and his birthday party where John the Baptist is martyred. There is always a temptation among those of us who are on "God's team" to believe that we are "safe". We will have health, wealth, wisdom, and God will conquer all our foes. Mark's story of John's death at the hands of an immature girl and an impotent puppet ruler is a shot of sobering truth. "Even the very best of us can be victim to the very worst, and sometimes even to the very worst in other people. And that's a message those in the first century, and us in the twenty-first century can relate to all too well." (The Rev. Rick Morley, *Silver Platters*, July 2012 blog post)

One of my favorite scenes in *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, by C. S. Lewis, is when the children are at Mr. and Mrs. Beaver's house hiding from the White Witch. The Beavers are helping the children get to Aslan (who is the Christ figure in Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*). They are asking the Beavers' about Aslan when Mr. Beaver says, "Aslan is a lion - the Lion, the great Lion." "Ooh" said Susan. "I'd thought he was a man. Is he - quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion?.." "Safe?" said Mr. Beaver..."Who said anything about safe? Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King. I tell you." Living in the heart of God's love and grace means that we are not always safe from the very worst that life can throw at us. For C. S. Lewis, who wrote the *Narnia Chronicles*, suffering is not the exception in our lives it is a part of the program of life. The story of scripture, even when it seems gruesome or confusing is telling us that God is not separated from us in our suffering. St. Paul's words to the Romans reinforce this truth: "... in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Blessings to all,

Martha+