

Holy Week: Day 4, The Mysterious Silence (adapted from material on 'unplowedground.org')

Nearly all of us in paid employment still have a "day off." –even ministers! And it also just so happens that, on the last week of Jesus' life, he also needed a "day off." And this was the day. For him it must have felt like the "calm before the storm." (Yes, believe it or not, even with the incredibly intense events of the past few days, Jesus' most intense days and hours were still awaiting him! I find that simply amazing. How much stress can one person take?!)

Oddly, the Scriptures do not clearly tell us what Jesus did on Day 4 of his last week i.e. today. Mark's gospel has one statement in 14:1 that says, "Now the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were only two days away..." (so...that would be, in our reckoning of time, Tuesday). That was a busy day: it began way back in 11:27 with Jesus arriving back in Jerusalem and answering the Pharisees questions, then teaching his disciples about the end times, and then finishing in the evening at the beginning of ch14 by being anointed at Bethany.

What happens next? In 14:12 Mark says "On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread..." (so that would be in our reckoning of time, Thursday from 6 p.m. onwards). In other words, Wednesday is missed completely.

On one level, we could chastise Mark: "You've just skipped a day in the most important week of human history! We want to know what happened! It was just getting juicy! Raising that guy Lazarus, not attending the ceremonial cleansing time, riding into Jerusalem to the shouts of 'Hosanna'. Then, the action scene where Jesus turns over tables, the public debate and the foreshadowing prophecy – culminating in a strange coronation as king. What happens next?!"

Here's a question for you: what if Jesus didn't "do" anything? Is that so bad?

For some people it is. I mean, imagine someone telling you "You've got one week left to live." I must confess: if I were told that, and if I had the same infinite power Jesus has, I would probably have gone around trying to do as much "good" as possible. I probably wouldn't be causing a commotion in the temple by trashing the place and I certainly wouldn't be taking a day off. You know what I mean?

But Jesus did. (Take a day off, I mean).

Now: I can just hear someone saying: "How do you know he took a day off? Maybe he did loads of stuff but it was simply never written down?"

This is just my humble opinion, but I doubt that.

Here's why: because this is the last week of Jesus' life and almost every phrase and nuance has been written down about Jesus' words and actions thus far and afterwards. In fact, this is the part of the record of Jesus' life that is the most "complete." Did you know that around one third of the stuff recorded about Jesus centres on his last week of life? Now, when it comes to other parts of his life, there's a lot that hasn't been written down in the interest of "space" and in the interest of more force in terms of "story-telling." (John closes his account of Jesus' life by stating: "Jesus did many others things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.") But, I don't think the gospel writers omitted key details of this part of Jesus' life. For that reason, I find the argument that "Jesus did loads of stuff, but it just wasn't written down" to be an unlikely alternative. I think it's more plausible that Jesus "took a day off".

The question that begs to be answered is "Why?"

I have one idea, one "speculation" (and let me stress: this is mere "speculation."). Bear with me:

Think about the structure of a typical church service? Its basic structure is what we call "antiphonal." An "antiphonal" service has a compelling format because it is the format of "dialogue": First, God speaks and humans listen. Then, humans respond and God listens. What if this antiphonal dialogue is rooted in Holy Week? I think it is.

In other words, what if Jesus' last week is antiphonal? First, God speaks and humans listen. Then, humans respond and God listens. Maybe Jesus "took a day off" because he was listening: listening to his Father, but also listening to see mankind's response to what he's just done since his arrival in Jerusalem. Maybe, Jesus was just listening. Just resting and listening. Preparing himself for what lay ahead. That preparation didn't just begin in the Garden of Gethsemane. Arguably it began at his birth, certainly at his anointing with the Spirit at the start of his ministry. But here, in this pivotal week, Jesus has a full day where he appears to 'do' nothing. A day of preparation: drawing strength from God, and listening to the ebb and flow of fickle crowd opinion.

And we are here tonight, resting and listening to what Jesus has done for us. We might even want to say that we are following the example of the Master, who was never too busy not to spend large amounts of time alone with God.

But we are also responding, we are *doing* something. 'Do this,' Jesus says, in remembrance of me. And as we sit here, we know that God is listening to us. We respond, he listens.

So in this quiet moment, before the busy commemorations of the next 3 days, let us listen to Jesus. And let us also respond, as he listens to us. And may the message of Easter challenge us afresh again as we listen, and respond.