Palm Sunday/Passion Sunday

Luke would have us know that two very different kinds of music came into Jerusalem that day, each of them entering through a gate on opposite sides of the city, each of them only the overture to a larger musical work that would unfold as the week went on. It was the beginning of Passover, and so Jerusalem's population had swelled with the arrival of thousands of Jews from all the surrounding regions come to celebrate the high holy days and to make their sacrifices in the Temple. The Temple elite, obliged to uphold and support the Empire's policies, was on-edge, watching to make sure the crowds did not disturb "Pax Romana," the "Peace of Rome," as they (the leaders in the Temple) were charged with maintaining order in their religious community.

Although Luke does not say so explicitly, **historical records** would suggest that the Roman governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, may very well have entered Jerusalem through the **west gate** of the city that day, come with "all the kings horses and all and the king's men" should there be any sign of unrest or trouble. While, **according to the story passed down in the community of faith**, through the **east gate** came a societal and political "nobody" named Jesus, a Jew himself, who had become a bit of a folk-hero amongst those in the Jewish community and beyond; those who had heard about or experienced Jesus' teaching, preaching, healing, multiplying of loaves, raising people from the dead, and challenging of the authorities in both the religious and political halls of power.

(Some of these Jesus-admirers and Jesus-followers had high hopes that Jesus would be able, by the power of God they had sensed in him, to overturn the power of Rome and restore Jerusalem to the "Shalom of God"… a kind of peace completely counter to that of "Pax Romana" led by Jesus, the "king of Peace").

When Luke wrote his Gospel in about 80 AD, it was a decade or so after the destruction of the temple at the hands of Rome, and the people in his fledgling community of faith (made up of both Jews and Gentiles) were struggling with questions related to essential identity markers as they sought to shape their lives in accordance with the way of Jesus; (i.e. "Which traditions and laws from Judaism were important to adhere to? Where was the dwelling place for Yahweh if the Temple no longer existed? What place did Gentiles have in the community of

faith? What were the requirements for 'belonging?' What did it mean for one's life to follow Jesus?").

Luke wrote his entire Gospel to address these questions… But the part of his narrative we will center ourselves on here are the events that unfolded in Jerusalem during Jesus' last week. And were we to listen very carefully, we might catch a sense of the music woven throughout Luke's narrative; music that sounded like something like this…

The Week Begins….

Through the west gate of the city Pilate's army proved their brawn,
Black boots marching, strident rhythm, voices raised in Empire's song.
Horses heaving breathing power, riders wielding swords and shields,
Chanting cries of strength and victory, death to those who would not yield.

Those who witnessed this brute power heard the thrill of monied might,
Systems built for markets' interest, those with status rich with rights.
Trumpets blaring, triumph glaring, flags held high, aloft, unfurled,
Music set in strict accordance with the values of the world.

Near the east gate of the city voices rang in glad accord
Singing ringing bringing welcome to a different kind of Lord.
Humble people lifting voices as angels did at Jesus' birth,
Offering praise to God's anointed, come to bring true peace on earth.

With joy their music filled the morning, notes ascending bright as birds
So to greet this one who entered, in whose heart God's Spirit stirred.
And in that stirring made such music as had never been conceived,
Reaching back before beginnings, Love's first loving first received.

A brief interlude to speak of the music that "was" Jesus according to Luke…. The music of God that had sounded since the beginning of creation … a music that was with Jesus and in him as he entered Jerusalem that day and as he moved through the events of the week…

Jesus' lineage traced to Adam, his family tree back to creation,
Showing thus an earthbound arc, a Sacred promise of relation
With all the world, God's reach stretched wide, Jesus taking deep inside
God's music to be glorified, incarnate love personified…

And so with tones of celloed depth, across his heart he drew the bow,
Giving every creature voice, both those above and those below.
Every note and every cadence, every wail and every call,
Sounding from God's deepest passion in the love-rent key of "all."

("All!" God cried to Abram's offspring, "through you all people blest will be."
"All!" God cried through Prophets' longings, "all the world embraced by me.
"Jew and Gentile, outcast, sinner, poor, imprisoned, lost, alone,
All creation at the table, in my loving knowing 'home.'")

Jesus was this love-strung music from the depths of God's deep presence,
Reaching back through Israel's story, singing themes of God's true essence,
Daring singing songs of "all" where no angels dared to tread,
Touching lepers, freeing prisoners, raising people from the dead.

It was this music he was bearing as through the gates he came that day,
Bringing gladness to the humble; to those in power, fear and dismay.
So now we hear the storm clouds rumble, as 'cross his body drew the bow,
Stretching "all" beyond all measure, and love beyond where love can go.

The dissonance grows…

As Jesus played of Love's beginnings encompassing all earth and skies,
And echoed deep the melodies once heard within the prophets' cries,
There came from those in Temple finery sneaky slipp'ry sharp attacks,
Questions meant to rattle Jesus, catch him in a verbal trap.

They played a kind of docile "muzac," (elevator-style perfected),
The God whose reach encompassed "all" firmly, squarely thus rejected,
Propping up a God instead who served their dreams of restoration,
A regal, royal, Hallmark God with glittered love just for their nation.

Amidst this "muzac" Jesus played in the love-rent key of "all,"
Melodies of wind-blown Spirit filling streets and squares and hall,
Jesus turning up-side down systems, tables, well-made schemes
While from their slipp'ry subtle "muzac" came a deadly darker theme…

A theme with underlying plans for asking Rome to play along
Temple muzac, Empire muzac joined together in a song
Designed to silence he who dared to play a music wild with love
A music joining earth and heaven, all things one, below, above.

A small interlude to hear the music Jesus played in preparation for what he knew was coming…

Knowing in his prophet's heart the coming rise of fear-filled power
He heard the grating sounds of death grinding toward his final hour.
So taking bread and wine in hand to nourish those he called his own
He sang the ancient freedom song of lamb and flesh and blood and bone,

A song in which he drew the bow across the sinews of his heart,
Taking, breaking, blessing, giving of himself the love-spent part,
And all were fed with grace and peace, despite betrayals yet to come.
Despite denials, failures, sins, the love of Jesus made them one.

And then the music turned to blues as Jesus spent the night in prayer,
Reaching deep inside God's absence for God's presence anywhere.
And having reached inside before to hear the Spirit ever near,
He heard the song from God's own heart, "I am with you, do not fear."

The Arrest and Trial…

What music then can speak of things that pierce the heart and take the breath?
What notes can sound to tell the tale of Love's arrest and scourge and death?
When forces come in dark of night, and betrayals come by way of kiss,
What melody or instrument could carry horrors such as this?

Only grinding sounds of gears moving toward a certain end
In a world where fear is king and truth is trumped by lies, pretend.
When those in power plot together, fixing games and cards and dice,
Their notes and tempos, scales and beats move deftly on toward sacrifice.

Temple leaders, Pilate, Herod, people watching from the side,
Soldiers, henchmen, frightened Peter who in shame the Lord denied…
Accusations, violence, cacophony and dissonance,
This the screeching sound surround the King who stood in innocence.

A brief pause in the musical score to encourage readers to read closely Luke 23:6-25 to get a sense of the ways in which the Temple leadership, Pilate, Herod and people in the crowd all participated in the events that led to Jesus' crucifixion… Luke tells us that there were women beating their breasts and wailing as they witnessed what was happening to Jesus, and others perhaps who had listened to Jesus teach and preach who stood silent, because, as Fred Craddock writes in his commentary on the Gospel of Luke, "they were powerless before the forces of religion and government joined in the execution of Jesus." But it seems most of the others "got caught up at that hour in the muzac of power" and joined in the cry of "crucify.'

And while it is true that neither Pilate or Herod found the accusations of the Temple leadership grounds for crucifying Jesus, they acquiesced in the end to the will of the crowd, because of course, "those whose positions and privileges are predicated on everything remaining as it is" (Craddock) could not tolerate the potential threat Jesus was to "Pax Romana."

The crucifixion…

The muzac then took on the sound of flesh and bone impaled by nails,
While lots were cast and scoffers scoffed and Jesus as a "king" was hailed.
"If you're a king, then act a king, and call upon the God you know
To take you down, and save your skin, and give us all a magic show."

But even then he reached inside from where the song of Love had come,
The music that had moved and stirred before creation had begun,
Every note and every cadence, every wail and every call,
Sounding from God's deepest passion in the love-rent key of "all."

(That love-rent key that will not bow to forces steeped in hate or fear
But takes them in and in that taking draws the bow so all can hear
There is no place where Love is not, no place removed from Love's full being,
Love stretched wide in mercy's song for the sake of healing, freeing).

He drew that bow for those who'd come to join with others in the cry,
And for those who'd played a part in the plot to crucify.
He drew that bow for thief as well, just like the father in the story,
Taking in his arms his son, home again in love's full glory.

Even stones cried out that hour, and sun and moon were drained of light,
All the Cosmos bent in sorrow, sounds of wailing filled the night.
The Temple veil was also torn; designed for keeping separation
Between the Holy Holy God and the flesh of God's creation.

Jesus' death…

It seemed the music ceased to sound as Jesus took his final breaths,
The song of God's vast love for all by pow'rs of hatred put to death.
No music then for those who grieved, for those who plotted or deceived.
Only Jesus' Spirit riven, into God's full presence given, into Love received.

Silence… the end…

It was finished. So they said. The king of Peace was dead and gone.
In a tomb his body lay, no more to sing God's love-rent song
Of Love for all of God's creation, a song of peace and liberation.
It was finished. So they said. The king of Peace was really dead.

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A poem written by one of the women who had been present at Jesus' crucifixion and burial. She wrote it on Easter evening, after hearing the news of Jesus' resurrection…

Just before the last breath,

Just before the final gasp and sigh,

Just prior to the grip of death

Screeching through the starless sky,

His stretching into the breach

Of retching grief

Was the moment

When the movement

Toward Easter began...

That bow drawn deep

Across his love-strung frame

A music wild,

Unleashed,

Untamed.

Shhh… listen..