



Lenten Reflection for Friday, April 8th
Loyal Miles

You can listen to the reading and reflection by clicking [here](#).

John 11:45 - 56

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council, and said, "What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation." But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed." He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. So from that day on they planned to put him to death. Jesus therefore no longer walked about openly among the Jews, but went from there to a town called Ephraim in the region near the wilderness; and he remained there with the disciples. Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves. They were looking for Jesus and were asking one another as they stood in the temple, "What do you think? Surely he will not come to the festival, will he?"

Today's reading comes fairly late in Jesus's story. At this point, the "following" that Jesus continues to inspire among the broader community is perceived by the community's spiritual leaders, the Pharisees, as a threat to their power and authority. 'If we let him go on like this,' the Pharisees say, 'everyone will believe in him, AND [emphasis added] the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation.'

To be sure, their community's very survival was precarious. The Roman authorities—the definitive political power in that world—had proven their capacity and willingness to destroy nations and peoples. Even so, what follows the "AND" in the Pharisees' statement strains logic. It may be a lack of historical understanding on my part, but given 1) the Romans' clear political authority regardless of the Jewish community's spiritual leadership and 2) the essential nature of *belief* in spiritual activities, the real implication for the Pharisees seems clear: everyone will believe in him AND not in us.

My reading of today's text is definitely informed by my own daily experience. When seeking to justify behaviors or actions that on some level my conscience finds at least worth further examination, one way of avoiding that

examination is to tag the behavior with something unrelated but that if actually related would be a good reason. A silly example: *I'm full, but that last piece of pie would be delicious, AND we need room in the refrigerator for leftovers.* I find myself to be fairly susceptible to this kind of logic, which confers a measure of permission for behaviors that my conscience might otherwise want to wrestle with.

Pie is pie and I can always find space in our refrigerator, but there was real evil working through the Pharisees' jealousy and anger at Jesus's threat to their authority. They wanted Jesus to be killed, but they also needed a justification that would secure the permission or at minimum the paralysis of the broader community. The latter is a vulnerability I experience: confronting evil—including the obvious such as the reports from Ukraine that are now a nightly feature on our television but also the smaller day-to-day non-truths we can get in the habit of practicing when looking for justifications—can feel paralyzing.

What can I do? What can be done? What does it really matter anyway?

These questions require care. They can fuel action, but they can also provide a kind of permission for allowing myself to be shocked and/or numbed into paralysis. It seems that the Pharisees, at the end of today's reading, we're hoping for some similar reaction from Jesus: 'Surely he will not come to the festival.'

Here, as we again prepare to celebrate Palm Sunday, we return to the mysterious logic of our faith, the comfort of knowing, even in the face of present evil and doubt, what will be the end of our story. 'Will he?' the Pharisees ask.

He will.

What then is to be our "and" as followers of Jesus in a world in which both God and evil are at work? I will believe in Him AND—



Loyal and his wife Lisa live in Windsor Terrace with their son Isaac (3). They are expecting the birth of Isaac's sister later this spring and look forward to returning as a family to church more regularly this summer.