



HOLY WEEK MEDITATIONS: **Wednesday**

Isaiah 50:1-9a; Psalms 70; Hebrews 12:1-3; John 13:21-32

Persecution in the early church was terrifying yet sporadic; some churches were rooted out while other Christian communities were untouched. It was like the London Blitz; one building was destroyed and another unharmed. In this environment, some Jewish Christians were tempted to recant Christian beliefs and find safety, since Judaism had legal protections Christianity didn't. A Jewish Christian who held to the faith may have felt a little like a Londoner in the Blitz.

Hebrews 12:3 says to that Christian, "Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart." Fear, whether of persecution or German bombs or even an invisible virus, can rob us of our peace.

Compare that to the fear Jesus must have felt as one who *deliberately* placed himself in grave danger. As the Servant says in Isaiah 50:6, "I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard. I did not hide my face from insult and spitting." In today's reading from John, Jesus practically has to lead Judas by the hand in his betrayal.

"Consider him," Hebrews tells us. So how *did* Jesus survive his ever-tightening vice of fear? Isaiah gives us at least two clues. First, "morning by morning he awakens—wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught." Over and over in the gospels Jesus goes off by himself, to pray, to reorient, to center himself in the Father's will. Second, in Isaiah 50:7 the Servant says, "I have set my face like flint, and I know I shall not be put to shame." Jesus, Paul, James and the rest are clear: to stand you must be single-minded. "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:2-3). This means seeing beyond the cares of this world, which wants you to believe that safety is paramount.

Your Father is watching over you. Yes, take sensible precautions. Always, cast your anxieties on your Father in heaven. But remember too that safety wasn't central for Jesus and it's not for us, whose treasure is in heaven.

Holy Week can seem like a conveyor belt drawing an innocent man passively toward man's and God's wrath. What these passages together show us is that when the time came, the "pioneer and perfecter of our faith" walked to the cross with steady, steely determination. When you "grow weary or lose heart," when you feel like the conveyor belt is pulling you toward what you fear, look at Jesus.

-Tim Collins