

Who could change the story? (John 18:1-19:42)

## **No one is solely responsible. No one is innocent.**

by [Melissa Earley](#)

April 4, 2023

*To receive these posts by email each Monday, [sign up](#).*

*For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.*

Eighty-one verses, 1,961 words. Three pages, single spaced.

That's how long it takes John to tell the story of Jesus' betrayal, arrest, abandonment, trial, torture, and execution. It takes about 11 minutes to read the story out loud all the way through. It is much too long to read in one sitting in a worship service, but that is exactly what we should do.

We want to hurry people through their suffering. Like Job's friends, we can only tolerate their discomfort for so long before we begin to give advice, offer solutions, and speak for God. The hardest thing I do as a pastor is sit with others in their suffering without trying to hurry them along. I have to choke back easy platitudes. I feel a crawling under my skin, a resistance deep in my chest when called on to simply be present. I want to fix it.

There is no fixing the woman who is preparing for her 38th back surgery or the parishioner whose cancer has come back. And they aren't asking me to. It takes discipline and courage to sit in the chair and listen, without patronizing pity, and just bear witness to unsolvable suffering.

But Jesus' suffering on Good Friday was avoidable. Throughout the story of Jesus' betrayal, trial, suffering, and death there are multiple places where different players could change the course of the story. Caiaphas could show more courage in the face of the Roman threat. Peter could admit to knowing Jesus. Pilate could show more

resolve in front of religious authorities. The Roman emperor could rule Judah with greater compassion and justice

Each action would shift the story and either eliminate or mitigate Jesus' suffering. John forces us to watch and listen at every juncture where someone could act but doesn't. Everyone seems carried along in the tide of brutality. No one is solely responsible. No one is innocent.

In 2021 3,597 children died by gunfire. Almost 2,300 of these shootings were homicides, a 73 percent increase since 2018. By 2020 gun violence surpassed car accidents as the leading cause of death for children in the United States.

Last May we were momentarily transfixed by horror in Uvalde, Texas, where 19 children and two adults were shot and killed at Robb Elementary. And then we turned the channel. School shootings account for less than 1 percent of gun deaths suffered by children.

No one is solely responsible. No one is innocent.