

*There is a tide in the affairs of men,
which taken at the flood leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
is bound in shallows and in miseries.*

Some very well known words from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, here Brutus debating with Cassius and Messala the timing of Caesar's downfall. 'Tide' is cognate with 'time' and the modern German, 'zeit'. *Time and tide wait for no man* and this is the time and tide for Jesus to make his mark – or rather, become a marked man, singled out for a particular, and bloody, vocation. That's a dramatic way of putting it so that we don't miss the sacrificial resonance of *beloved son* - the same term used for Isaac when God asks his father, Abraham, to offer him up as a sacrifice and the New Collegeville Bible Commentary goes on to tell us that:

'In ancient Passover Liturgy, Isaac's sacrifice is referred to as a voluntary act on Isaac's part (and) Isaac merges with the Passover Lamb as it is said that Isaac's blood was placed on the doorposts so that the angel of death would spare the Israelites.'

And yet another resonance here with Jesus' end is the word for the splitting apart of the heavens, used also for the splitting open of the sanctuary veil after his death. But, as well as this passage denoting both the beginning and ending of Jesus' ministry, the Spirit's presence as a dove echoes the Spirit hovering over the waters at creation, so this scene has a cosmic dimension bringing all time under its wing, and all people, as we hear in the passage from *the Acts of the Apostles*:

It is true God sent his word to the people of Israel, and it was to them that the good news of peace was brought by Jesus Christ – but Jesus Christ is Lord of all men.

And so, also, the relevance of the passage from Isaiah:

*Here is my servant whom I uphold,
My chosen one in whom my soul delights.
I have endowed him with my spirit
that he may bring true justice to the nations.*

So there's rather a lot going on in today's feast and it's a fitting end to the Christmas period and the beginning of mission, and this is what we are for, too – or rather what we are in for – taking on the mantle of the Spirit, not for our own sake, but for the sake of others.

If you want to ground it in present circumstances look no further than Covid -19 and what this is asking of us in terms of love. It's yet one more crisis, of many, waiting to define us. What are we really here for? Can we take this time at its flood or forever wallow in the shallows?

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