

Maundy Thursday, April 6, 2023

Recommended readings: p. 354, "Sept 15, 1963," p. 355, "Youth Sunday," p. 356, "On 'Brevity'"

Rita Dove's poem "Youth Sunday" imagines the final thoughts of Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, and Denise McNair, four children killed in the bombing of a Baptist church in Birmingham in 1963:

"This morning's already good—summer's
cooling, Addie chattering like a magpie—
but today we are leading the congregation.
Ain't *that* a fine thing! All in white *like angels*,
they'll be sighing when we appear at the pulpit
and proclaim, "Open your hymnals—"
Addie, what's the page number again?
Never mind, it'll be posted. I think. I hope.
Hold still, Carole, or else this sash will never
sit right! There. Now you do mine.
Almost eleven. I'm ready. My, don't we look—
what's that word the reverend used in
last Sunday's sermon? Oh, I got it: *ethereal*."

*Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son.
May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice.
May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness.
May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and
crush the oppressor... May all kings fall down before him, all nations give him service.
For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper.
He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy. From
oppression and violence he redeems their life; and precious is their blood in his sight...*
(Psalm 72)

The biblical ideal of good government is tied to the treatment of the poorest and most vulnerable citizens of a nation. Psalm 72 says that a just and righteous ruler will bring prosperity and even international respect to their people. Throughout the long history of the fight for racial justice in this nation, children have been placed on the front lines—walking a gauntlet of hate to enter their integrated schools and even dying as martyrs. For this to change in a democracy such as ours, it must be the will and the desire of our citizens that creates this change.

Prayer

God of justice and righteousness, you have placed us among the citizens of a nation that governs according to the will of the people. Help us to claim the power of our citizenship that we may defend the cause of the poor, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressive powers that perpetuate need and poverty in our communities. Amen.