

Readings for Thursday, April 25, 2024

Toyohiko Kagawa, Social Reformer, 1960

Psalm 140

Eripe me, Domine

- 1 Deliver me, O Lord, from evildoers; *
protect me from the violent,
- 2 Who devise evil in their hearts *
and stir up strife all day long.
- 3 They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; *
adder's poison is under their lips.
- 4 Keep me, O Lord, from the hands of the wicked; *
protect me from the violent,
who are determined to trip me up.
- 5 The proud have hidden a snare for me
and stretched out a net of cords; *
they have set traps for me along the path.
- 6 I have said to the Lord, "You are my God; *
listen, O Lord, to my supplication.
- 7 O Lord God, the strength of my salvation, *
you have covered my head in the day of battle.
- 8 Do not grant the desires of the wicked, O Lord, *
nor let their evil plans prosper.
- 9 Let not those who surround me lift up their heads; *
let the evil of their lips overwhelm them.
- 10 Let hot burning coals fall upon them; *
let them be cast into the mire, never to rise up again."
- 11 A slanderer shall not be established on the earth, *
and evil shall hunt down the lawless.
- 12 I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the poor *
and render justice to the needy.
- 13 Surely, the righteous will give thanks to your Name, *
and the upright shall continue in your sight.

Job 13:13–22

“Let me have silence, and I will speak,
and let come on me what may.

I will take my flesh in my teeth,
and put my life in my hand.

See, he will kill me; I have no hope;
but I will defend my ways to his face.

This will be my salvation,
that the godless shall not come before him.

Listen carefully to my words,
and let my declaration be in your ears.

I have indeed prepared my case;
I know that I shall be vindicated.

Who is there that will contend with me?
For then I would be silent and die.

Only grant two things to me,
then I will not hide myself from your face:

withdraw your hand far from me,
and do not let dread of you terrify me.

Then call, and I will answer;
or let me speak, and you reply to me.”

Luke 22:47–53

While Jesus was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; but Jesus said to him, “Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?” When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, “Lord, should we strike with the sword?” Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, “No more of this!” And he touched his ear and healed him. Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, “Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!”

Collect:

Strengthen and protect, O God, all those who suffer for their fidelity to Jesus Christ; that, like your servant Toyohiko Kawaga, they might persevere in seeking and serving Christ in all persons, and work tirelessly for the advancement of your kingdom; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit be all honor and glory now and for ever. *Amen.*

Toyohiko Kagawa, Social Reformer, 1960

Toyohiko Kagawa, born on July 10, 1888, in Kobe, Japan, was a Japanese evangelist, advocate of social change, and pacifist.

Kagawa was the son of a wealthy Kobe Buddhist business entrepreneur-politician and his concubine, both of whom died when Kagawa was four years old. The youth was raised by Presbyterian missionaries and had a conversion experience at the age of fifteen. “O God, make me like Christ,” he prayed repeatedly.

Kagawa studied at theological seminaries in Japan and at Princeton University and Princeton Theological Seminary, but was increasingly drawn to an evangelism of social reform, seeking to apply Christ’s teachings directly to Japan’s poor in a theologically uncomplicated way. From 1910 to 1924, he lived for the most part in a six-foot-square windowless shed in Kobe’s slums. A skilled organizer, he helped found trade unions and credit unions among dock workers, factory laborers, and subsistence farmers. Trade unions were forbidden at the time, and Kagawa was twice imprisoned. He was also a pacifist and organized the National Anti-War League in 1928. Kagawa was arrested in 1940 for publicly apologizing to the people of China for Japan’s invasion of that country. An advocate for universal male suffrage (granted in 1925), he later became a voice for women’s right to vote as well.

A prolific author, his autobiographical novel, *Crossing the Death Line* (1920), became a best seller, and many of his other novels and writings in a Christian Socialist vein were translated into English. He used the revenues from his substantial book sales to fund his extensive slum work. Although Kagawa was under police surveillance much of his life, the Japanese government called on him to organize the rebuilding of Tokyo after a 1923 earthquake and again at the end of World War II to serve as head of the country’s social welfare programs.

Although some knew him best as a social reformer and pacifist, Kagawa saw himself first of all an evangelist. “Christ alone can make all things new,” he said. “The spirit of Christ must be the soul of all real social reconstruction.”

Kagawa died on April 23, 1960, in Tokyo.