

14 Joseph

(Mark 15:42-46)

I went straight to Pilate. I didn't ask permission, I didn't ask anyone else, I just went straight to Pilate and asked for his body. Asked that we could take him down, find him a tomb, bury him and at least add a fragment of dignity to the story of this otherwise cruel and brutal day.

Pilate may have been surprised that he was already dead but none of us were. After all, we'd been with him through the whole experience. We'd seen his mockery of a trial. We'd seen his whipping. We'd seen him dragged already half dead through the streets with that brutal cross bar tearing the flesh from his shoulder. We'd seen him jolt with the pain of those driving nails, and then we'd seen him as he was lifted up, as the cross bar was brutally hammered into place, as his blood soaked into the wood and dripped onto the ground. We'd watched him in the burning sun for six hours, hanging there. We were not surprised at all, he was dead, and as much as it cut us to the very heart to lose him, we could in many ways only be thankful that his agony was over.

When some members of the council heard what we were asking they came rushing to Pilate as well. They argued, they tried to insist that his body should not be released, that he should not be allowed his freedom even now. But Pilate seemed agitated by the whole thing. He seemed to be disturbed and all the more disturbed as we told him of how he died.

"Take him! He barked. "Take him and bury him. Bring an end to this whole thing!"

We went with the soldiers back to Golgotha. The one was there who had driven those nails in in the first place, a brute of a man, or so we thought. But it was his friend who took his spear and thrust it into his side. After all that they had already done to him, as dead as he was, they still could not leave him in peace. The flow seemed unstoppable, blood and water, flowing, pouring, soaking the ground. But the other soldier? Well he surprised us, as his friend brutally smashed the legs of the other two, he removed the nails he had so cruelly driven in that morning with an amazing gentleness, almost, ... almost with love?

We wrapped him in the shroud we had brought and carried him across country to the garden. We met no one, thank God, and said nothing to each other until we had entered the tomb. Then, lifting him together, we laid him on the slab.

It was getting late, the light was nearly gone and the Sabbath nearly begun, so we needed to work quickly. We unwrapped the shroud, but as we did so we were both struck dumb and motionless, we stared, silent and still.

Whether it was the jolting as we carried him or what, we don't know, but his eyes were open. Those eyes once so bright, so full of life, so full of love, now drained, now tired, now lifeless. And yet what struck us into this rigid silence was a sense that even now, yes even now, there was love. Even now, after all of this, somehow there was a sense of reaching out, of him reaching out in love.

How long it was we don't know, but eventually I did what any good friend would do. I reached out and gently shut his eyes. And as those eyelids closed, it was as if a peace descended upon us.

It was as if we heard his words: "Do not let your hearts be troubled, trust in God still and trust in me."

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