

“It was nine o’clock in the morning when they crucified Him.” Mark 15.25

That afternoon, His body hung lifeless and limp on a cross, the victim of Roman crucifixion. Though the breeze moved through His hair, His head was slumped motionless, the entire weight of His body bearing down on arms and legs nailed to wooden beams. Joseph of Arimathea had seen crucifixions, but had never been involved in removing a dead body from a cross. Moved by a deep sense of purpose, He did not know what to expect when he brought the men to the murder scene to retrieve Jesus’ body. When the Roman soldiers received word that Pilate had approved the removal of Jesus’ body to be handed over to Joseph for burial, they laid their wooden ladder against back of the upright beam and a soldier climbed up. Another soldier went around front and hooked the iron rod onto a nail and with some effort managed to wriggle the spike from the wooden beam and pull it out through the flesh of a foot. The leg straightened and hung down. The soldier on the ladder waited while the other foot was unfastened in the same way and then the soldier on the ground joined the first soldier about half way up the ladder. Handing the tool to the soldier on top, the lower soldier swung a large burly arm around Jesus’ waist and held him fast. The soldier above braced the rod on the top of the crossbeam, hooked it into a nail, and began stirring and pulling down on the tool until the wood released the nail and the nail came out through the flesh of the arm, falling to the ground. A limp arm fell to the side of Jesus’ naked body. The soldier in the middle held tightly while the nail was removed from the other arm. The soldiers on the ladder, one holding an arm and one holding the waist, transferred the weight of the body to the soldiers on the ground with the help of Joseph and the men. The body went to the ground.

Joseph quickly covered and wrapped the bloody and torn body in a linen cloth that he had newly purchased. Joseph and his men placed their arms under the back and legs and, with one man supporting the head, lifted the body and placed it on a nearby wooden cart. A young donkey, attached to the cart, stood looking around at the men. Just six days ago on the first day of the week Jesus had ridden this humble creature triumphantly into Jerusalem.

The Joseph and Nicodemus wiped the dark blood from their arms and hands and quietly led the animal and cart down the road to where the women were waiting. Together, the small band of mourners slowly made their way through the countryside, walking next to the cart. Joseph kept a steady hand on the donkey, while the rest walked along occasionally glancing a Jesus’ body rocking from side to side, listening to the footfalls of the animal and the wheels turning on the uneven dirt road. Mary, Jesus’ mother, laying her hand on Jesus’ head, walked with Mary Magdalene beside her. The other women walked behind them, and John and Nicodemus followed close by. The trip to the grave seemed to continue longer than anyone had anticipated and little was said as they travelled. Joseph had already explained to Mary that he was giving an unused tomb for Jesus’ body and she thanked him sincerely for his kindness and devotion to Jesus.

When they arrived at the tomb, the sun was already beginning to set. Several of the men walked to a large stone that blocked the entrance to the cave and, placing their shoulders and hands on it, they struggled with great effort to roll the heavy stone back, revealing a dark opening in the rock. The men returned to the cart and again scooped up the body in their arms. Joseph himself entered the cave with a torch followed by the men who shuffled down into the narrow opening with the body. Joseph directed them to a rock shelf along the left wall where they laid the body down. The men turned to look at Joseph who nodded gravely and they left the cave. They returned shortly carrying three heavy earthen jars and a linen cloth which the men began to tear into large strips. Joseph, handing the torch to one of the men and pulling aside the linen shroud that covered Jesus’ head, took a strip of cloth and plunged it into one of the jars. Pulling it out, the cloth was enveloped in a sticky sweet-smelling substance. Nicodemus lifted Jesus’ head and Joseph quickly wrapped the head with the cloth strip as viscous droplets fell from it. The men handed Joseph another strip which he plunged into the jar and Nicodemus and another man lifted Jesus’ shoulders as Joseph wrapped the neck and shoulders. This continued as the men wrapped Jesus’ entire body. Rolling the body onto its right side, the remaining spices were then poured under the body on the rock table and then on top of the body. Joseph and Nicodemus took the fine linen shroud and laid it over prepared body. Using the remaining lined strips, the men wiped the honey-like oils from their hands and arms. Then, except for Joseph and John, the men departed from the cave with the empty jars, leaving the torch with Joseph.

When the men emerged outside, Mary Jesus’ mother, followed by Mary Magdalene, stepped inside into the fluttering torchlight that cast a golden glow on Jesus’ body. The room was hand hewn from the rock and large enough for four or

five to stand upright. It was as new and as clean as a rock cave can be, but apart from the sweet smell of spices, it felt dark and lonely.

The sun was fading outside and they knew they must depart soon to begin their observance of the Sabbath. Even so, Joseph thought to himself that the Sabbath seemed so much less important than being here with Jesus. His life would never be the same now that he had shown himself to be a follower of Jesus. There would be no returning to his place among the Sanhedrin. All that once seemed to have value had now faded and nothing else mattered to him but this marvelous manifestation of God and God's love. They stood quietly in the shadowy glow of the torch and gazed at Jesus' body lying on the stone shelf, covered with the beautiful blue linen shroud that was stained with blood. With hands held over their mouths, tears flowing freely, Jesus' mother and Mary Magdalene leaned close to the body. Mary straightened Jesus' head and tucked a soft fold of blue linen under & behind. Mary Magdalene did the same with Jesus' feet, delicately placing the linen under them. Magdalene touched Mary, placing her arm around her, and quietly whispered, "We will return again on the first day to anoint Him." Mary nodded in approval, caressed the side of Jesus' shrouded face and departed from the cave.

After the women had gone, Joseph and John stepped out into the fresh evening air. Their work had been hurried, but they had done what they could and it would have to suffice. Joseph held the torch for the men as they put their shoulders to the great stone and set it back in place over the entrance to the cave. Satisfied that the tomb was sealed, Joseph turned and indicated that they should return to their homes. Then Joseph too departed to his home, and Nicodemus went with him.

Mary the mother of Jesus, along with Mary Magdalene and others, started for John's home where many followers of Jesus would be waiting. As they walked the evening road together they were filled with many thoughts about what had happened today. A hush seemed to fill the countryside and a red and purple sunset faded into night as they made their way, marveling and weeping. They hungered to pray – as Jesus had taught them to pray – and pour out their hearts to Abba, Father, God of all comfort, the One Who loves them and calls them by name; Whose love and comfort they needed now, this night, more than they had ever known. When they arrived at the house, they embraced each other, and wept, and prayed: "Our dear and precious ABBA! FATHER of us in heaven! Let the Name of You be sanctified, and set apart, and magnified above all others! Let come the Kingdom and eternal dominion of You! Let be done the will of You...as in heaven, also on earth! In our hearts and our lives and in our time!"

Mingled within the events of human history and activities of men, God's love had become conspicuously manifest. Those who stood and watched Jesus die, who witnessed the darkening of the sky and the shredding of the temple veil, who saw His concern for His followers and His compassion for those who reviled Him, did not merely see a gory Roman crucifixion. They saw love struggling – through writhing pain – to make itself known and not even hideous torture could prevent it. "Father forgive them for they know not what they do!" Who say such a thing?! Who would be thinking about THAT in the throes of agonizing death? Perhaps only someone Who was what they said they were. Not pretending. Not putting on a show. But real from the infinite depths of being. The Son of God calling out to His Father for the salvation of a lost world.

This love broke their hearts! It caused secret followers of Jesus, like Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, to come to the realization that nothing else mattered and nothing had any value, apart from Jesus. They gave up their reputations, their standing in their communities, their wealth, their lives to become known as "followers of Jesus". They loved Him.

It caused a Roman Centurion, who had crucified hundreds, to take note of this One. He could have looked at Jesus and said, "Yeah, yeah, whatever! Just another religious nut spewing hatred for Rome and venting his religious psychobabble." But no! It wasn't like that at all! Jesus looked at these Roman soldiers with compassion, saying in His heart, "If only they knew!" And so He prayed, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do!" Something that the Centurion witnessed that day melted his heart and caused him to utter the extremely unlikely words, "Surely this was the Son of God."

Oh for Love! Oh to know the infinite depths & and eternal expanse of God's Love! Jesus loved them with "no grater love." He laid down His life willingly for his friends AND His enemies! When we see how crushed Jesus' followers were

at His loss, how much He meant to them and how they “mourned and wept” for Him, we see how much they loved Him: how dear He was to them; how precious He was and how He filled their emptiness with Life and hope and comfort. And we see how much He loved *them*. He loved them to the end. He was tender with them, and blessed them, and protected them. He opened spiritual truth to them. And even though Jesus had to rebuke them for their unbelief because they did not believe the initial reports that He had risen from the dead, their grief was evidence that they could no longer live without Him. Their lives had come to a standstill without Him and everything else was meaningless without Him. Jesus has become their Life – “Christ our Life”.

“And before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He should move from this world to the Father, loving His own in the world, He loved them to the end.” (John 13:1 LITV)

And oh how the story continues! ...

<http://www.scripturesongs.net/misc/The-Acceptance-of-the-Sacrifice-of-the-Passover-Lamb-of-God.pdf>