

Walking with Joseph St. Mark 15:1-15

We often think that the Gospels prepare us for the Messiah's death. Yet, I think that within some of us there is a tiny part that hopes that this year the Passion of Jesus will not end the same. Perhaps the multitudes we see things differently. Maybe injustice will be overthrown by justice. Jesus might just crawl down from the cross and teach those who shout obscenities a lesson.

No, this story is not a DVD movie that has alternative endings. The Passion of Jesus is an invitation to follow Jesus, to follow a path. This invite is not to change the route but to be changed by the walking of it. The story calls us up and in and deeper and farther. In this story God summons us to see ourselves and, if we dare to reveal our inner selves, we will see lost opportunities to right injustices. We realize anew that Jesus must stay on the cross, because no one can forgive like Jesus.

We tend to shy away from forgiveness that willingly includes crucifixion. Our idea of justice wiggles all over the place thinking about this kind of suffering. It should not be a surprise then, that the crucifixion is seen as dishonor. The Messiah crucified becomes a stumbling block in Jesus' day as it does in ours.

Jesus' life was faultless, he never caused anyone harm, was a healing agent for many, brought Good News to the poor, food to the hungry, and created miracles. Yet, they arrested him on false charges where the verdict had already been handed down. Jesus was innocent of all charges. It all just seems so unfair.

I have had the experience of being summarily dismissed for things I had not done with no recourse. Left alone, feeling unloved, persecuted, life seemingly unfair.

Jesus provides a way out of our bondage. Is it possible for anything to be more unfair than Jesus standing in our place for our sins? But it is his suffering that reconciles us and the world with God. The prophet Isaiah preaches: "All we like sheep have gone astray (Isaiah 53). . . but Jesus – "took up our infirmities", "and

carried our sorrows”, “was pierced for our transgressions”, “and by His wounds we are healed.”

Still, the story intrigues us and drags us beyond ourselves. Can you walk into this story? Are you able to allow the story to walk into you?

At least one in the crowd, a centurion, did recognize the injustice, and Jesus finally does come down from the cross, but his body is dead. It is here in the story that we meet Joseph of Arimathea; a well-liked member of the Jewish Council and a closet Jesus follower.

As we walk with Joseph we do so without the benefit of knowing much about him. Yet, it was he, not St. Peter or any other disciple, who has the courage to ask Pilate for Jesus’ body. Picture the scene as Joseph walks away from Golgotha toward the tomb. Slowly at a pace of someone deeply burdened, perhaps pulling a cart or leading a donkey, as reality sets in. Numb from the events of the day, the thought of life without Jesus is startling. Soon, Barabbas will be roaming around again and that’s scary!

“This was not the way it was supposed to be. If this is the Kingdom it’s not for me” or something like it must have been rattling around in Joseph’s brainpan. It was a quiet, lonely walk. There was a chilling silence present as he makes his way to the tomb. These times and events are past words. He finds himself caught between life and death.

As with Joseph, you and I are probably asking: *“What about the promises of Jesus? How on earth is he going to rebuild the temple in 3 days? If Jesus was who he said he was why didn’t he save himself?”*

St. Mark 15 invites us to ruminate on Passion Sunday. We miss so much when we hurry to the resurrection, Easter, and the new life. That is the beauty of the Christian calendar and the lectionary. They do not let us rush past these passages of Scriptures. Because when we look toward Easter we need Lent, Passion Sunday, Maundy Thursday, and Good Friday. Without dark and rainy days can we truly appreciate sunny days?

Yes we live in an unfair world and as we have seen, Jesus understands - having been through everything this world unfairly and cruelly did to Him. Yet we can claim the promise given in Romans 8:28 *“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God.”* Our God is more than able to transform our sufferings into something good for us, for His kingdom, and for those we love.

So will you join Joseph as he makes his way to the tomb of Jesus? As we wait today, somewhere amidst mourning and anticipation, the wound of crucifixion still biting, but the promise of resurrection is ahead. In this middle of all of this there is a holy silence. Are there answers or words for the deep emotions and distressing questions within? Not quite yet. We journey certain of what has happened, hopeful for what is to happen. Alleluia. Amen.