

A Borrowed Tomb

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Luke 23:44-56

44 It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, 45 while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. 46 Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last. 47 When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent." 48 And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. 49 But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

50 Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph, who, though a member of the council, 51 had not agreed to their plan and action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God. 52 This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 53 Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid. 54 It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. 55 The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. 56 Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

The people gathered in the parade on Sunday did not imagine what would happen the rest of the week. When they waved their palm branches and shouted "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord" could they have believed that just a few days later, Jesus would be crucified? Jesus knew it. Jesus told his disciples about it repeatedly, and they could not believe it. Those of us gathered here today know it. When we began this service today with the waving of palm branches and the singing of a hymn of glory for our Redeemer and King, we knew what was to come. The parade which began in shouts of praise from what Luke describes as a "multitude" ends with a much smaller group watching from a distance: Luke says "all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things." They did not know what was to come, but we do.

We know about what Luke calls "these things." We know that Jesus is unjustly tried and executed. We knew all of that when we were waving our palm branches. So, do we now back off and watch these things from a distance, or do we follow Jesus to the cross?

Just as there were two parades that day, there were two prayers Jesus offered up from the cross just a few days later. One was "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And I wonder: does Jesus pray the same prayer on our behalf? Do we still not know what we are doing? Or do we know, but choose to do it anyway? This week began with a chance to shout praises to our King, but now the hard part begins. We might prefer to stay at the parade, waving our palm branches and shouting praises, but if we do so, we'll find that Jesus isn't there. Jesus has continued on toward the cross, and if we want to be with Jesus, then we must follow, because we *do* know.

The second prayer that Jesus offered from the cross was "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." It is an echo of Psalm 31, which is often labeled as "Prayer and Praise of Deliverance from Enemies." The Psalmist mentions turmoil all around with enemies seeking to destroy, but in the midst of this sorrow, there is trust: "You are indeed my rock and my fortress...you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God." This is the trust which Jesus has in God when he prays, "into your hands I commend my spirit."

Jae Won Lee, Assistant Professor of New Testament at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago writes "' Rome used crucifixion to terrify people who cherished alternatives to dominant imperial values, especially defiant slaves and unruly foreigners." God's kingdom and Caesar's clash when Jesus journeys to Jerusalem. Jesus' trust in the mercy and fidelity of God undergirds this confrontation. So at the moment of his death, he commends his life to this God. (*Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 2: Lent through Eastertide*)

We who would follow in the way of Jesus must also trust in God, our rock and our fortress, for the way is not easy. Jesus said "the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it." Our trust must be like that of Jesus, who willingly gave up his life, trusting it to God's care, trusting that God would redeem this situation which seemed to all who were there as hopeless.

And so he was buried in a *borrowed* tomb, for he would soon have no need of it.