

## HOW CAN THIS BE?

Rev. Gary Magarrell

Good Friday 2010

An eerie darkness has engulfed the land around the Holy City of Jerusalem. Business goes on as usual though people are curious about the unusually dark sky for so early in the day. Passover had taken place last night and the city was beginning to settle down. Or had it in reality?

A great drama had unfolded in the governor's palace. Pontius Pilate, the newly installed governor of the Judea territory of the Roman Empire had been confronted very early in the morning by the Jewish leaders demanding to see him. When he consented, they brought with them a man named Jesus of Nazareth to be tried. They made it very clear they expected the death penalty for this man. Pilate tried to placate the religious leaders but he only made them angrier.

Funny, Pilate thought, for a man facing possible death, Jesus was not very communicative. Jesus made no attempt to talk his way out of this problem or to plead for mercy. Rather, he calmly stood there and waited for Pilate to speak.

Pilate remembered that he had been warned to have nothing to do with this man. Pilate soon ascertained to his satisfaction that Jesus had not committed any crime worthy of death, especially the crucifixion they were demanding. I will offer to free one man: either the murderer Barabbas currently in prison or Jesus the man standing before him. To his horror, the frenzied crowd demanded he release Barabbas and crucify Jesus.

Afraid of creating any major disturbance, Pilate handed Jesus over to the soldiers for crucifixion and washed his hands of the whole affair. Scourged, beaten and weak from loss of blood, Jesus stumbled along the cobbled streets dragging the cross on which he was to die. It was early, about 9AM, when he arrived at the place of the skull known as Golgotha, the killing field. A man had been pressed into carrying the cross part of the way under orders of the guards. Now above the form of Jesus the soldiers placed a sign which read The King of the Jews. This infuriated the Jewish leaders but Pilate would not have it taken down. What I have written is written!

Little was said by Jesus as he hung on the cross, his life slowly ebbing away. Two bandits were crucified along with him, one on each side of him. The first mocked Jesus and dared him to get off the cross and save all three of them. The second bandit chided the other saying they were at least guilty but Jesus was not. Then he uttered those wonderful words we will sing at the end of this service: "Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom." To this plea, Jesus spoke of the two of them this very day walking in Paradise, the king's special garden.

From noon to three it became very dark and people were worried as to what this all meant. To the Gospel writers, this indicated all the earth awaited this awful event. From three to six o'clock, Jesus spoke few words and died surrounded by female friends including his mother. The guards had thrown dice for his few clothes.

Horrors of horrors, Jesus was dead! His disciples were all terrified and nowhere to be seen. The presence of a few women reminds us that Jesus' men followers were not there.

These women played key roles in the story of Good Friday and Easter Sunday. They witnessed Jesus' death, they followed the body after his death and they saw where Joseph of Arimathea laid the body in a tomb. Finally, they witnessed a stone being rolled to seal the tomb. And we recall, these women were the first ones to see Jesus after the resurrection and verify that the tomb was indeed empty and Jesus was alive.

Let us put ourselves in the shoes of those who experienced this horrid day, a day when their dreams were shattered as Jesus' life ebbed away. None of the followers were proud of themselves. Peter had denied knowing Jesus not once but three times. Judas Iscariot had sold his soul for thirty pieces of silver and finally hung himself. The others had hidden or could not bear to witness their beloved Jesus dying so cruelly on the cross, that symbol of suffering and shame.

One by one they slunk away to gather together later to compare notes, to weep and to share their bitter disappointment that the last three years had ended so badly. Now what do we do they wonder quietly to themselves and aloud to each other. Three wonderful years and all we have to show for it is the death of the one we followed. How can this be?

You and I have been on this pilgrimage to the cross for six weeks. We have walked and talked with Jesus. We have experienced anew this time of great passion and pain.

How has this journey been for you this year? For me, Easter has always held the central place in my faith journey. One can become blasé about some things but never Easter. Either Jesus was who he claimed to be or he was an out and out fraud.

As the years pass, I am more convinced than ever this man Jesus was and is who he claimed to be. The Lenten journey, the yearly ritual of the pilgrimage to the cross, the death and the resurrection of Christ has a power that convicts me over and over again.

And now we wait. It is black Friday, the Friday we choose to call Good Friday. We wait for the sound of the nails biting into the wood; we feel the wind in our faces as the sky darkens and the heavens rumble; our Lord's body is growing weary and his breaths are shallow, chest heaving, body weakened by the loss of so much blood. His head is down, his crown of thorns now fully visible, his shame nearly at an end.

Hushed we stand in silence as the great drama plays itself out. We ask: how could anyone endure this agony, especially when it is all born for others including ourselves so that we might know the depth of God's love for us.

I stand here helpless, feeling worthless. Yet on that cross, my Lord and Saviour sacrificed his life for me. For me, I shout, for me! For you, you shout, for you!  
Wow! What a message of hope and love. Together we thank you God for your love, for your willingness to forgive and for your unwillingness to give up on us.

Quietly a song permeates my head and heart and soul this day and each day of my life:

Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom.

Amen.