

Lent Mid-week 6  
March 16, 2016  
John 19:38-42

In Christ Jesus, who did His best for us and gave us eternal life, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

### **The Passion As I Remember It!**

So far this Lent we have heard from Malchus, Annas, Peter, Pilate and the repentant thief as they remembered the Passion of our Savior.

Tonight we will hear an imaginary speech by Joseph of Arimathea, the man, who with Nicodemus, laid the body of Jesus in an earthly tomb after Jesus died on the cross. Joseph was a rich follower of Jesus who was also a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council or senate in Jerusalem which first condemned Jesus to death. The New Testament tells us in Luke 23 that Joseph did not go along with the plot to condemn Jesus. Joseph became a believer in Christ, but up to that time secretly, for fear of his unbelieving Jewish friends and fellow members of the Sanhedrin.

Tonight we imagine Joseph of Arimathea describing to us, a group of early Christians, what happened when Jesus died and was buried. He is speaking to us as we are gathered for worship in Jerusalem about six months after Jesus rose from the dead.

Dear followers of Jesus of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Lord and Savior. I know that you are gathered here tonight in this room to pray in the name of Jesus and to share with one another some of what you remember that Jesus said and did. I am glad that you asked me to tell you what I saw and what I did when Jesus died on the cross.

I know that some of you must think that because I am rich and because God has blessed me not only with wealth but also with a seat as one of the 70 members of the Sanhedrin, that I cannot really understand what Jesus means to you.

But remember as Peter often reminds us that God is no respecter of persons. Jesus taught us that we trust in God not because we deserve His help but rather because He is merciful, gracious and forgiving. I need God's mercy and forgiveness for my assurance of heaven as much as any of you who are slaves, widows, tax collectors, fishermen, merchants. or who have repented and turned away from a life of stealing, prostitution, or any other evil ways. Jesus came to save sinners, and I know that I am a sinner, like you.

I want you to know that just because I am a member of the Sanhedrin, which condemned Jesus to death, I did not share in that vote. Nor did I take part in their plot to stir up the people against Jesus or to bribe Judas, to betray Jesus. Both Nicodemus and I were very unhappy when we got word of the plot against Jesus. We hoped it would come to nothing. We intended to warn Jesus, but because we thought the plot would not happen until after the Passover, as the High Priest had said he wanted, we neglected to take action right away. I must confess that we were too timid, afraid and too weak.

But when we saw how fast things happened with the betrayal, the arrest in the Garden, the nighttime trial before the High Priest and all of the false accusations, we protested as much as we dared to. Caiaphas was bound and determined to declare Jesus guilty and our disapproval and objections in the Senate meant little, they were ignored. I had always thought that I had the respect of the other members of the Sanhedrin, but when I tried to defend Jesus they shouted me down and threatened to expel me.

Nicodemus and I had spent many hours in the year before Jesus' death talking about the things Jesus had said and done. You remember of course, the night Nicodemus secretly came to Jesus find out exactly where Jesus got His power to do His miracles.

At that time Jesus told Nicodemus about the Kingdom of God and how no one could enter into it unless he was born again of water and the Spirit. We talked about his conversation with Jesus over and over again, trying to grasp what Jesus' words all meant. We did take comfort in Jesus' words to Nicodemus when He said **"AND AS MOSES LIFTED UP THE SERPENT IN THE**

**WILDERNESS, EVEN SO MUST THE SON OF MAN BE LIFTED UP, THAT WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHOULD NOT PERISH BUT HAVE ETERNAL LIFE. FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, THAT WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHOULD NOT PERISH BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE. FOR GOD DID NOT SEND HIS SON INTO THE WORLD TO CONDEMN THE WORLD, BUT THAT THE WORLD THROUGH HIM MIGHT BE SAVED."**

When I saw Jesus hanging on that cross those words came back to me. I know now that Jesus willingly allowed Himself to be arrested. He willingly allowed Himself to be beaten and to be crucified. He knew it was His Father's will for our salvation. But I must shamefully confess that I was not as brave or vigorous in defending Jesus as I should have been.

When I saw that even the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate, gave in to the High Priest, the Sanhedrin's decree and the crowd that they had stirred up demanding Jesus' death, then I had to go to Calvary and see Jesus. I thought even then, that Jesus had the power to just strike them all dead and come down from the cross and walk away safe and free. I didn't really understand God's plan for our salvation at that time.

I stood there with tears in my eyes and a heart being torn in two and watched it all. I heard Jesus' words of comfort to the thief. I watched the crowds mock and jeer Him and then fall silent when the darkness came upon us all. I heard Jesus cry out **"IT IS FINISHED!"** and then His final words, **"FATHER, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMEND MY SPIRIT."**

He died on that Friday just shortly before sunset. I knew then that I had to do what I could to give Jesus a decent burial. So Nicodemus and I gathered our courage and went to Pontius Pilate and asked for Jesus' body so we could bury Him. I had a tomb, a new above-ground cave dug out nearby, that we had not yet used. It was prepared for myself and my family.

When we asked Pilate for Jesus' body, he was surprised that Jesus had died so quickly. He had a soldier go and check and see if it was true. Then he gave us his consent. Nicodemus and I took Jesus' body down from the cross and carried it to the tomb. We had to hurry since it was almost sundown, the beginning of the Sabbath, and, as you know, no Israelite could work on the Sabbath.

So we did the best we could. We hurriedly wrapped Jesus' body in linen with a few spices, laid it in the tomb, and rolled a big stone to seal the doorway. Mary Magdalene and some of the other women from Galilee followed us as we took Jesus' body to the tomb and promised that they would come do a better job of preparing Jesus' body after the Sabbath.

But, praise the Lord, as you know Jesus rose from the dead early Sunday morning before the women got there. It was a miracle we had not expected, even though Jesus had told His disciples several times that on the third day He would rise again. We were just too emotionally distraught to remember and understand those words.

How much clearer we now see and understand what God was doing than we did six months ago. Seeing Jesus after His resurrection and hearing His words for the 40 days until He ascended have clarified and strengthened our faith. And since Pentecost the blessings of the Holy Spirit through the Word has made such a big difference in all of us. We still have much to learn, but we want to tell everyone that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the God-Man our Savior, who suffered and died for us and rose again to secure for us our salvation, forgiveness and everlasting life. How wonderful it is to know that Jesus, who died, lives and that He is our risen and ascended Lord who now rules all things. I hope and pray that all of you are as excited and eager as I am to spread this good news of Jesus who was crucified and risen.

Like Joseph of Arimathea, we too are often timid, fearful and too slow to speak up for what we know is true and what is right. Like the disciples we also are often slow of heart to believe and weak in action to proclaim to others the love of our Savior and the good news of His sacrificial death and glorious resurrection. We too often worry about what others may say or how they will feel about us.

We need to take our sins of fearfulness, timidity and spiritual weakness and lay them upon Jesus at the foot of the cross and rejoice in His forgiving love. Then with Jesus' love motivating us, like Joseph and Nicodemus, we will strive to do our best in our service to the Lord.

Everyone of us can see our own weaknesses, sins and failures even as we see the sins, weakness and failure of Joseph and the rest of those individuals who were a part of the events that led to

Jesus' crucifixion and death long ago. How thankful we are that Jesus indeed was willing to go to the cross for us, die for us and rise again for us. When we hear again the account of all that Jesus suffered and endured for us, we thank God for His grace in sending Jesus to be our Savior. Praise God!

Amen.