

Good Friday A 2020

When I woke early that morning, I had this feeling that something was wrong, seriously wrong. The sky was overcast but, more than grey, it was heavy and oppressive. It was hard to believe that this was the eve of the day when we celebrated our liberation and freedom, our Independence Day. Yes, something was radically wrong. I went out, not sure why, probably just wanted to see who Pilate would release, as he usually did on this day. Never ever agreed with his choice, which was probably more political than anything. Pilate always wanted to curry favour with the people.

There seemed to be an unusual number of people out and my curiosity was piqued. People were making their way to the courtyard in front of Pilate's palace. They all seemed sombre, harbouring some brooding sadness; no-one was laughing, there was no notion of joy to be found anywhere. Coming from one of the towns on the furthest reaches of Israel, I rarely came to Jerusalem for the Passover. This had been a good year, or so I thought, now I was having second thoughts. Little did I know that the day would degenerate even further.

Two men were brought out and pushed roughly into the sight of the people. One I knew to be a ruthless killer and outlaw, Barabbas, the worst kind of person you never wanted to meet. The other had been cruelly tortured; they had flogged him mercilessly and even pushed a crown of thorns into his head. There was blood everywhere. It was more than ugly. It exposed the heartless insensitivity of Pilate, who was immaculately attired from head to toe.

Acting as if he were playing chess with these people, he was seeking to bargain with them. Why on earth were they all shouting for Barabbas?? I knew the Jerusalem people to be rough and ill-natured but this was callousness at its worst. They should never have asked for his release but they didn't even seem to care what Barabbas would do once released and allowed to vent his fury on the innocent. It was sickening. To make matters worse, the crowd began yelling for crucifixion – they must have really hated this man - already half beaten to death.

Despite the hate, disgust and brutality of the people around him. He stood there with a certain dignity and grace.

If anything, he was the only dignified person there. Even I had not the dignity to shout out for his release - pretending to be a bystander. The soldiers were in their element. They enjoyed inflicting punishment, no not punishment, torture! All too soon the half-dead man with dignity and grace was shouldering a cross-piece even though hardly able to walk with it. The only reason they dragged someone to help him was because they did not want him to die on the way up to Golgotha. Rightly called the place of the skull because it saw many skulls of the dead. Despite the hateful cries of some in the crowd who should have known better, I saw others crying, wracked with sorrow and grief. It was obvious to all that they really loved this man. These were the people with hearts; unlike the others who seemed full of poison and filth. One woman even rushed from the crowd to try and ease his sorrow - wipe his face. There was hope for humanity yet!

It was when he met the woman, who was obviously his mother, that tears came to my eyes. My mother would have been inconsolable if that had been me. It was then that the complete injustice of what was happening hit me like a blow in the guts. And yet I still did nothing to try and stop what was happening - always been a coward, me. The chap - Simon I found out - helping with the cross, had appeared angry and insulted at the beginning but was now showing a certain empathy and a desire to help as much as he could. There was something about this bloodied man that changed people - at least, those people who had hearts to change. I discovered his name was Jesus - ironic really, because the name meant Saviour, and here he was being dragged to his death. I had never met him but heard great things about him. I now wish I had taken the time to go see him while he was free and at large.

The cruelty of crucifixion made me feel sick and I had to rush off to empty my stomach. Yet, all the while, dignity and grace remained with Jesus. His dignity was such that it allowed him even to forgive his accusers and killers with genuine forgiveness. - Oh, how I wish I had known him better!

What also struck me was that I heard a centurion say "*This truly was a son of God*". . . . Even a pagan recognised his greatness! This man wasn't just any son of God but **The** Son of God. My early apprehension

and sense of wrong was replaced by a realisation that this was a most sacred moment.

The clouds had grown darker, there was a great clap of thunder and lightning and I was later told that the temple curtain was ripped in two. I stood there overcome with guilt. I had helped bring Jesus to this point by my inaction. I stood before Jesus now feeling utterly naked, exposed, but recognising that even in death his dignity and grace remained. The same dignity and grace that caused me to cry out for God's mercy - for me - for us all.

Despite the anguish, and sorrow and disgust at what had happened, I felt, no, believed, that we were forgiven, all forgiven. It was a forgiveness that urged me to care for all who needed help, to sacrifice myself for others, to work for peace and justice. Yet, his was a forgiveness that made no sense unless lived in this new way with dignity and grace.

Lived in what I came to understand was the way of LOVE!!

There was a belief gradually growing stronger within me that this could not be the end. There had to be something more, something even more incredible and I was willing to wait After all his Name was Jesus - Saviour . . . ??

There is something in me that is not content to hang about directionless along the edge of the path ... A thirst in me so deep it will move aside the rocks, seeking moisture. There is a yearning that is intense in its desire to put God first.

It may take a lifetime, but I have no doubt this unnameable Mystery within, the seed that fell at the beginning of creation, will finally crowd out the thorns.

Yes, there is One who believes in me enough to continue singing up the country of my heart.

~ from *THE SONG OF THE SEED* by Macrina

Wiederkehr

It appears to me that whatever we suffer now will show up only dimly when compared to the wonders God has in store for us. It is as though all creation is standing on tiptoe longing to see an

unforgettable vision, the children of God being born into wholeness.

Although creation is unfinished, still in the process of being born, it carries within it a secret hope. And the hope is this: A day will come when we will be rescued from the pain of our limitation and incompleteness and be given our share in a freedom that can only belong to the children of God.

At the present moment, creation is struggling as though in the pangs of childbirth. And that struggling creation includes even those of us who have had a taste of the spirit. We peer into the future with our limited vision, unable to see all that we are destined to be, yet believing - because of a hope we carry so deep within.

*Could it be true that some folks die
Because our hope is too small to bring them forth?
It is good to remember:
We do not give birth to ourselves.
We give birth to others
by believing in that first, small spark of life,
the spark we can barely see.
It is called hope.
Immensely hopeful at birth.
Forgive me Lord for not having hope
Forgetting hope
not believing
not feeling
not trusting
They need the gift of hope I can offer them,
and when I withhold hope
they suffer
they Die*

or, . . . may never be born!
Forgive me Lord!