

In the Garden: Hosanna! Save Us!

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John 19:38-42

After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there. John 19:38-42 (NRSV)

Join with me in prayer. *Gracious God open us up. Open our eyes that we might see and our ears that we might hear, open our hearts, God, that we might feel. And then, O Lord, open our hands that we might serve. Amen.*

There are a lot of gardens in Scripture. Obviously, there was the Garden of Eden in the beginning and the word *Eden* simply means *pleasure*. Then at the very end in Revelation 22 there is a garden in the middle of the New Jerusalem in the City of God which is a picture of the restoration of the Garden of Eden. But in the middle, there are other gardens. And we've been looking at this profound garden - the Garden of Gethsemane. But now we want to shift to a different garden and that's the garden in which there was this tomb. Again, "Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified and in the garden, there was a new tomb which no one had been laid."

The story goes that these two men, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus come and take the body and put it in the tomb. Let's talk about who these men were.

Joseph of Arimathea is mentioned in all four of the gospels, he's a rich man, and he was a part of the Sanhedrin which is the ruling council made up of 72 elders. They made decisions both religious and civil for the Jewish nation. It was headed by the chief priest who chaired the Sanhedrin. It included both religious and civil leaders and Joseph of Arimathea was just a citizen

and was important here. We know that he was the one who got the linen shroud to wrap the body of Jesus. He was the one who had the body of Jesus taken down from the cross. We know that he was the one who laid Jesus in the tomb and it was this tomb that belonged to him. It had been prepared for Joseph.

Now Nicodemus is only mentioned in the Gospel of John and he's mentioned three times there. He comes to Jesus at night. He's a Pharisee, a rabbi, a teacher of the Jews and he's heard about Jesus' teachings. He comes to him at night and that's where Jesus says, "You must be born from above. A new birth in a sense. If you want to be transformed." Nicodemus is also on the Sanhedrin and he has a place of authority and he sits on this ruling Jewish council. He's the one who brings the spices, the oils, the aloe and the myrrh to anoint the body as was the Jewish custom.

So, you have Joseph of Arimathea who provides the tomb and the shroud, and Nicodemus who brings the spices. What can we learn from these two men? What can we learn about how they dealt with Jesus at this garden tomb?

Three things I want you to see and here's the first one. That these men took action - they did something. The Scripture says that they didn't tell anyone that they were disciples. What they did was show them. They showed them that they were disciples.

A lot of people like to wear their faith sort of as a bumper sticker or a tee shirt. I hope that you're comfortable talking about your faith with others. I hope you're comfortable sharing that you're a follower of Jesus, that you're not ashamed of that. But what's more important than what we say, is what we actually do. These are men who chose when push came to shove to show people that they were disciples.

I love the phrase that it uses here. It says, "he was a secret disciple." You know, I believe that out in our community, out in the world around us there are so many secret disciples. People who are doing the work of the faith, who are putting it into action, who aren't spending their energy talking about it but who are actually doing it. Matthew 21 is the story of Palm Sunday and you heard it read earlier in the service today.

Here's what would happen. Jesus was staying in Bethany for this Holy Week and he'd come in every day, down that same road that he came on that Palm Sunday. And he would teach in the temple, in the courts around the temple. On the first day - on Palm Sunday - he doesn't stay there, he returns. But he comes back the next day and he begins to teach and the first thing he teaches is

a parable. Here's the parable from Matthew 21:28-34: "What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir' but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?"

Well, the answer is obvious, isn't it? That the one who actually did something and didn't just talk about it.

There's a story, another part of Jesus' teaching in which he says, "When you pray, go into your closet and pray in secret. And the Father who sees in secret will reward you. And when you fast don't walk around and tell everybody how you're fasting and try and show off your fasting so that they will reward you. But instead do it in secret so that your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

Why does he say that? Because he realizes that we have this deep need for recognition. And we have this tendency to want to things just so people will see us and recognize us. So, we talk about it.

There's a wonderful line that says, "Integrity is what you do when no one is watching."

I think that when I see these men that they chose to actually do something and not try and trumpet what they've done.

Friends, this is a time in which we're called on to take action. And part of that action is just to stay home. But what can we do? What are the things that we can do that actually make a difference?

Again, I hope you'll go on our COVID-19 response page to see ways that we can be people of action. We have our food drive every Saturday and last week we brought 250 bags of food. I don't know what we did yesterday. We have a group of people who are helping to feed the young people of reVision. We have a new chef who's joined our staff actually to be part of a separate non-profit that's our workforce development program as we train people to go into the business world and work. But we do it in a culinary setting and this is a new non-profit that's beginning. Well, we've been able to bring Adam aboard and he's been coordinating work to try and feed people in our Gethsemane community and the young people of our reVision ministry.

We have a booklet called "Serve 75" that came out as we began our 75th year church anniversary and it's full of all these organizations and all these opportunities to volunteer. Now many of those opportunities you can't do right now because you're at home. But I will tell you

that the organizations that are in there are all vetted and are doing great work and they need support. If you can support them, I hope you will. Whether it's financially and certainly with your prayers. And when the times comes, to volunteer for them. We want to be people of action. And we want to feel that within us right now since we're at home looking for ways that we can make a difference.

These men Nicodemus and Joseph were people of action, men of action.

Here's the second thing. Joseph and Nicodemus were courageous. They were people of courage. In fact, the Scripture is so interesting because it says that they were people who had fears of the Jews. It wasn't that they weren't afraid, but they were willing to push through that fear and take action.

All through Scripture this phrase runs. It's in Deuteronomy, in Joshua, and in Psalms, "Be strong and of good courage. Be strong and courageous." We're called on as followers of Jesus to be people of courage. God didn't give us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of self-discipline. That's as Paul writes to Timothy.

There is a great story about Phillips Brooks. He was a pastor during the Civil War, a great abolitionist. He preached at Trinity Church in Boston. The story is that he was a big man - 6'4" and about 300 pounds. As he was preaching, he was telling stories about the pioneer days and the adventuresome people who led across the country as part of Manifest Destiny. A young man was listening to him, and he said, "I wish I had been alive and a young man at that time and I could have been a hero like those men." And Phillips Brooks said to him, "You know, if you can't be a hero now you wouldn't have been a hero then." There are always opportunities for us to be heroes.

We have heroes all around us right now. There are the doctors, the nurses, the medical technicians, the caregivers in assisted living homes. People who work in grocery stores. People who deliver to our doors the things that we need. I saw the mailman coming by the other day with his mask on and I thought that I hadn't even realized that he just keeps touching places that might be full of infection. These are the everyday heroes that are around us. We're called to live with that same heroic spirit that is full of courage. And sometimes that courage just says, "I'm going to be willing to sacrifice my own comfort, my own desires and just stay home, and to love people from a distance."

One of the things that I think about when I think about Joseph and Nicodemus is how they must have cared for each other. They came together as they made these decisions. I can imagine them sitting in the meeting of the Sanhedrin and visiting together as they people were talking about what they were going to do with Jesus. And what happens is that they catch each other's eye and neither one of them consents to his arrest or crucifixion. So, they build this partnership, this connection with one another. So that when the time comes, they know that they have each other, to support one another as they take this courage, these steps of courage.

Frankly, I think this is such a strange time. Because I feel this longing to be with our congregation, to be with the people I love, to be in the after-church fellowship, and hug necks and shake hands. And to hear stories and to be together. To be in the Sanctuary or the Fellowship Hall with our congregation. And I feel that longing inside. Yet at the same time I feel more connected to people in the congregation than maybe ever before. It's like as we've come together in a challenging time. I've heard some people say this time is like they experienced during World War II. I'm not sure whether that's true, but we'll find out in the days ahead. But as we come together as a community and lock arms together, virtual arms, to make these courageous stands.

There's a great meme that I've seen that I hope you've seen also. It's of two trees and their roots are holding hands. Talking about how we can stand strong together. We can be people of courage in this time of everyday heroes. Each one of us can be one of those.

We know that the men took action and we know that they were courageous. There's one more thing that's really important that I want you to see. They honored Jesus as King.

It's Palm Sunday and this is the day we talk about Jesus as King. As he came riding into the city, they waved the palm branches as a way of saying he's king. They shouted "Hosanna! The Messiah has come to save us! This is the king who'll be like King David was. He'll lead us to freedom." The disciples and all the people treated him as king. Until he was crucified. And then you don't see the disciples, but who you do see are Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. And they give him a burial like a king.

I found it interesting to think about the spices. Why 100 pounds of spices? Some of the translations say it was about 75 pounds but either way. Gamaliel who was one of the great teachers of Israel was buried with sort of a royal funeral. And they only used 40 pounds of spices for him, the historian Josephus tells us.

This tomb was that of a wealthy man. Anointed with 100 pounds of spices. They treated this crucified king as a king. They made him sovereign in their lives.

We ask when you join the church, "Do you accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of your life?" And people say, "Yes." And often they think of *savior* - that's the thing that comes to their minds, "I've accepted the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and by his grace I've been saved." But sometimes we miss the part of being *Lord*, about being king, about being sovereign in our lives. That being the ruler of everything we do and think. I think that's what Joseph and Nicodemus were doing. They were deciding at that moment that they would make Jesus sovereign in their lives.

There's an old novel called *The Robe*, written by Irving Douglas that was made into a movie of the same name in 1953. It won two Academy Awards and starred Richard Burton. It's a story of a man named Marcellus who was the commander of the Roman guard in charge of the crucifixion of Jesus. Through all of this he hears Jesus talking, sees his love and ultimately becomes a follower of Jesus. And he writes back to his fiancé Diana in Rome and says how he's met this man and how this man is so amazing. He writes about his teachings and he tells her he's decided to become a follower of Jesus.

Here's what she writes in return: "What I fear is that this Jesus character might affect you. The story of his life is beautiful. Let it remain so. We don't have to do anything about it, do we?"

Wow - I wonder how often we think the same thing. The story of Jesus' life is so beautiful, but we don't have to live any differently do we? We don't have to be transformed. We don't have to choose to forgive. We don't have to give our lives away. We don't have to give up our comfort. We don't have to give up a sense of security by being generous to others and giving of our time and energy.

That's often how we think of it. The truth is that the Gospel is transformative. And we're called on to make Jesus sovereign.

Friends, we're going to walk through this Holy Week and as we do so I want to invite you to think about the difference that being a follower of Jesus makes in your life. We're going to cry out "Hosanna! Save us!" And boy, we need a savior now more than ever. We recognize our need of a savior. But let's not forget that we claim Jesus as Lord. That Jesus will be sovereign in our lives and will be the ruler of everything we do or think or say.

Let's pray together. *O God of love - Hosanna! Come save us! On this Palm Sunday we pray that by your Holy Spirit you will make us people of action, more than talk. That you will make us people of courage, bonded together in love. And that we will give you all the honor and make you the king and ruler of our lives. Amen.*