

On the way to Calvary - Hilary McDowell
Week 6 - The final Furlong
Sunday - A Kind of Coronation



And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.

It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS. Mark 15:24-26 (NIV)

Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews." Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written." John 19:19-22 (NIV)

Just four words: 'And they crucified him.' That was all Mark could manage. Well, he wasn't there, was he? None of them was, none of the men except John. So Mark keeps it curt, clear, clinical. He tells of the soldiers casting lots for Christ's garments, he records the hour of the event, and he quotes the words of the inscription on the placard above the Lord's head. His record continues later with some details of what else was taking place around and about the central act upon the cross, but not a word do we hear from Jesus in Mark's account, until Christ's last breath on the cross. For an eye-witness account, only John's Gospel will do.

What would the traveller do at the top of that hill? Could she stand amid that baying, irreverent crowd and witness such scenes of utter barbarity inflicted upon her Master? The dream carrier got there before her and was anxiously searching the crowd. Many criminals had experienced this already and there would be more. He glanced with disgust at the small knot of soldiers already arguing over who should inherit the clothes of the dying. They would rip them to shreds if there was no other way to settle the dispute. Perks of the job, he

thought with great sadness for the underpaid, overworked men who had to be the instruments of execution and then go home to their families or their own grim thoughts at the end of each gory day. They won't rip his robe, he thought, it is seamless, as the Boss had directed garments made for the holy priesthood to be (Exodus 28:32). Sure enough, they didn't, but instead cast lots for it, gambling over an item woven carefully and lovingly, perhaps by a woman who loved Jesus deeply.

In the crowds there were Romans, Jews, Greeks, all manner of nationalities, for Palestine was a crossroads of the known world at that time, thanks to the Roman roads and the steadily growing empire. Many were just passing through as Simon had been, but few stopped, as he had been given the honour to do. None was able to ease Christ's burden as the cross was raised high and dropped with a jarring thud into the hole dug for it in the ground. Everyone could read what the placard said above the alleged criminal's head, for it was written in Hebrew, Latin and Greek. Pilate had made his point in writing, sky high. His hands were washed, his finger was pointed at those who betrayed their own, and ironically, by the very inscription 'King of the Jews', his back-handed witness to the truth of sovereignty of Jesus stood for all time, a memorial from the cross.

The dream carrier still could not find Tracy. He pushed on between priests and workmen alike, between Pharisees and Sadducees, between court officials and common men. He saw Jesus refuse the wine and myrrh, the nearest thing available as an anaesthetic to deaden pain. DC paused momentarily to thank the Boss for taking the experience of the pain of the world's sin upon his shoulders without a clouded mind. But where was the traveller? Then he found her.

She did not look like a person at all - just a pile of clothing curled into a tight ball, huddled upon the ground at the forefront of the crowd, with her back to the cross and leaning her weight against three women who stood in devastating stillness, staring up at the figure hanging there and clinging to each other as if they were drowning. The dream carrier's foot caught the edge of the bundle and it brought him stumbling to his knees beside her.

'Tracy,' he whispered with tears in his eyes. 'Tracy, is that you?' she lifted her head towards the direction of his voice, but her eyes remained tightly shut and her body began to rock backwards and forwards in a desperate motion of self-comfort. 'I can't look,' she sobbed. 'Please don't ask me to look, DC.' He wanted to take her in his arms as a father would a child. He wanted to hold her so tightly that the nightmares would flee; he longed to wipe every tear from her

eyes. Most of all, he longed to tell her the dream, the dream he had never carried, the one the Boss had dreamed himself. It was a dream of a perfect garden where no thorns grew and where all God's children could walk without fear; a dream of people made in the wonderful image of the creator - an incredible achievement- living in a universe teeming with life. It was the hope of a relationship between creator and creature which would bring fulfilment to the creature and great joy to both. He longed to tell her how, even though the first human couple had destroyed the beginnings of that dream by disobeying the Boss and making the world into a broken earth, the Father had never given up his dream or his creation, or his love for her, huddled as she was now at the foot of the cross.

'It's not over yet, Tracy. The dream continues. This is part of the Boss's plan.'

'But it's not fair, DC, he is innocent.' Her tears would not stop. The dream carrier felt her pain deeply and wished he did not have to ask her his next question, but ask he must.

'Would you have us all pay, then, Tracy?' his eyes were soft in the asking. 'It's too much,' she whispered. 'Nobody could pay for the world's sin unless...' 'Unless they were God,' she almost choked out the answer.

'But he had to be human too, Tracy, a human who lived and breathed and walked among humans; who struggled with temptation as you do, who endured the pain of the broken earth as you do, who wept as you do, yet without sinning. Only a God who walked in perfection upon the earth, as a man, could undo the harm done by Adam and Eve and pay the death sentence for us all.'

She hated her sin then, hated every tiny, molecule of it. Suddenly that which seemed so small to her was brought into clear focus by the instrument of the cross. Like a microscope, what was happening just a short distance from where she crouched brought magnification to the events and actions of her past life, and her sin seemed to take a form that was tangible in the stench of the blood and excrement discharged from other prisoners undergoing execution. She saw sin for what it really was, a cancer to be slashed from her life as a surgeon wields his knife without compromise. Feeling naked upon the dirt ground, she felt the trembling bodies of the three women as she huddled closer against their backs. What could they see that she was too frightened to look upon? Was he looking down at them?

Dear Jesus,

I wish I could blame Adam; I wish I could Eve, I wish I was at home in the 21st century with its rationalizations, its scientific arguments, its 'retail therapy' when we feel a little down. But I have smelt the stench of sin; I have cowered from loving eyes that wept upon a cross. I know better, because I have been afraid to watch you die.

Forgive us when we hide from the cross. Amen