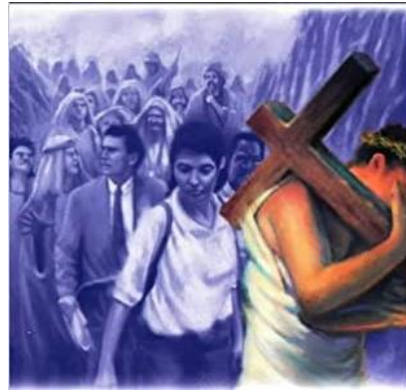


**On the way to Calvary - Hilary McDowell**  
**Week 6 - The final Furlong**  
**Tuesday - On Similar Crosses**



*Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.*

*Luke 23:32-34 (NIV)*

*One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"*

*But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."*

*Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."*

*Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."*

*Luke 23:39-43 (NIV)*

The dream carrier began to describe to the traveller what she had not seen. He told her of other crosses that had given her no pain because her thoughts had been on the unfolding drama of the central cross.

'I don't need to know this, DC,' she protested in frustration. 'Can't you see? It's hard enough for me to face the dying of Jesus without worrying about real criminals who deserve everything that's coming to them.' the moment she said it, she felt guilty; it sounded insensitive. 'I'm sorry. Go on, then, tell me about the others.'

His description did not need to be too graphic. She had already seen the crosses erected and was aware of the others standing on either side of the Master's cross, but had taken no notice of the two criminals who flanked the central action.

'This one,' said DC, miming to his right, 'took out all his frustrations on Jesus and blamed the Lord fully for the predicament that the other criminals found

themselves in. "Save yourself and us!" he yelled, as if he had a right to salvation on demand. Know anybody like that, Tracy?'

She blushed as the thought of rather too many occupants of her home church pews who, Sunday after Sunday, expected 'salvation on demand' without giving a thought to the possibility that their rightful place might well be upon a criminal's cross. Might she ever have been one of them?

'It is so difficult in my time, DC' she explained. 'The very word "sin" has gone out of fashion. When people's consciences are pricked by seeing immoral actions all around them, they dare not protest for fear of being accused of making "value judgements", and when they feel guilty about something they have done contrary to God's commands in the Bible, well, there are plenty of voices to insist that they shouldn't worry because "everyone is doing it". Each person's opinion is elevated to the extent that absolutes are disintegrating, and where art once reflected life, now life often apes the behaviour of the current most popular soap opera characters.'

DC was listening quietly to the tirade of genuine frustration, and when she paused to draw breath, he quietly asked, 'So you don't feel able to choose a cross, then?'

She blinked. What on earth was he talking about? He mimed to his left and continued, 'On the other side of Jesus, another criminal was praying his rightful dues on a similar cross.'

'What had he done?' she queried.

'As a matter of fact, I'm not sure,' said DC. 'But it really doesn't matter.'

'It doesn't?'

'No. Sin is just sin, Tracy, everything from so-called white lie to full-scale murder, it's all disobedience to God's loving commands and every part of it grieves his spirit.'

'You want me to choose between these two crosses, and you say they are equally guilty. Well, then, what is there to choose between?'

DC smiled patiently. 'The second man wasn't shifting blame. He knew what he had done and was ashamed of it. He acknowledged his guilt and appeared to know of Christ's innocence and something more. When he asked the Lord, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom", he showed great faith - faith that there was more to life than planet Earth and that Christ had the power and authority that he had claimed to have, power over life and death and eternity.'

'It was real repentance, Tracy, and you know what? Jesus said, "Yes." He actually promised that criminal a place in his eternal kingdom right there and then, while they hung on those crosses.'

She didn't have to answer DC then. She knew that he knew that there was no contest. Who would choose the cross of the damned when forgiveness was offered, full and free, in response to Jesus? She wished she could fly home right then, for thousands, perhaps millions, inside the Church and beyond its doors were nailed right now to the wrong crosses and did not know, or had forgotten, the necessity for making a choice before it was too late.

'You can tell them later, Tracy,' DC said, reading her thoughts, 'but first you have to decide whether to return to Calvary or keep running away.'

She knew that she must turn around and retrace her steps. Christ was still on the cross and she must look into his face. The thought terrified her. What would she see there? It is true that he had said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing?' and if he forgave his enemies and the criminal who had repented, she need have no fear as he hung on the cross? To know that her sin through the years was still contributing to such sorrow...she could not bear it. But she had to go.

As she, and DC with her, stepped forward to return to the cross, the dream carrier held out his arm to halt her in her steps. 'It is finished,' he whispered as though he had heard Jesus speak those very words. 'Look!' and the dream carrier pointed to the sky.

It was getting dark, very dark, despite it being only the sixth hour. For three hours, until the ninth hour, she could not see her way ahead to walk even one single step.

**Dear Lord,**

**Forgive every moment I waste or delay in telling others of your saving offer of life. You warn us, again and again, to 'work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work' John 9:4.**

**Will I never see you face because of the darkness all around? Shine your light, the light of your truth down the centuries to illuminate our steps, in church, in shopping centres, in schools and hospitals, banks and leisure centres. Shine your light through me, and may not a moment be lost in helping weary travellers to find their way to Calvary and beyond. Amen**