

Reflection for Good Friday 2021

So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.' Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, 'Do not write, "The King of the Jews", but, "This man said, I am King of the Jews."' Pilate answered, 'What I have written I have written.' When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.' This was to fulfil what the scripture says, 'They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.' And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

(John 18: 16b-27)

'Were you there when they crucified my Lord?' Perhaps, but where were we? There were so many gathered around the cross at the Place of the Skull.

We might have had a vested interest in seeing this crucifixion through. If we had a position among the temple authorities, we'd have looked on one of those who was hanging as a threat to our status. Not that we cared very much about the man himself, as long as we could protect our own authority and place in society, but we'd have been there.

We might have been part of the classic rent-a-crowd, there to jeer, to upset proceedings. In fact, crucifixions might be our regular form of entertainment. Some people just like seeing others suffer. Or we might have been drawn by the idea of protesting against this show of force by the Roman authorities. Either way we'd have very little concern for whoever was on the cross, but we'd have been there.

With that kind of crowd, Roman soldiers would be there in full force so we might have been part in that army, or alongside them with a job to do. We'd have then been so used to seeing the force of law enacted in this way that it would be nothing more than a day's work, with perhaps pickings to be had. So we'd have been there.

This weekend was festival time in Jerusalem so there would have been extra crowds. So we might just be country folk drawn by the noise and hubbub, in our annual visit to the big city, being spectators, absorbing the details so that we'd have a story to tell when we got back home.

Whether the individuals being crucified would have meant anything to us is doubtful. We'd have just accepted that they'd done something wrong, but we'd have still been there.

On the other hand we might have been among the grieving, the family and disciples of Jesus, losing an immensely charismatic leader and with him the vision of a new and better world. Looking up at the man we believed could overcome all oppression, with nails in his hands and feet, hanging on the tree. Our emotions would be running wild, but we would have been there.

I wonder who we'd see at the foot of the cross today. There might not be a crowd. After all, why should Jesus matter to anyone. Can he still disrupt the *status quo* as he did two thousand years ago in Jerusalem? Well, yes, but perhaps not so much as to be worth turning out to see him die. So maybe the only people there would be a small grieving group of family and friends. So let us take up our place alongside them on this Good Friday, to shed our tears and to tremble as they crucify our Lord. Amen

Ann Barlow