



31 March 2018

SECRET BELIEVERS

John 19:23 “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. 24 So they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.”

John 19:31 “Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. 32 Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. 33 But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. 34 Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. 35 (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) 36 These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, “None of his bones shall be broken.” 37 And again another passage of scripture says, “They will look on the one whom they have pierced.” 38 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. 39 Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. 40 They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. 41 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. 42 And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.”

It is Friday: the “day of Preparation” for the Sabbath.¹ The bodies of criminals nailed to a wooden cross would desecrate the Sabbath,² and so plans are made to remove them before sunset on Friday. John tells us that two “secret disciples” of Jesus - Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus – wrapped the body of Jesus and buried him in a nearby tomb.

This is fascinating glimpse into the lives of these two men. Men who found it difficult to publically support Jesus, now risk ritual uncleanness by wrapping a body on the eve of the Sabbath. Perhaps we are all a mixture of fear and heroism. There are moments when even the best of us struggle to stand firm for the things we believe – and then there are the moments of great celebration when the most frightened amongst us exhibits great risks of faith.

¹ Abundant evidence indicates that John’s expression “the day of Preparation of the Passover” (John 19:14), simply means “the Friday of the Passover week.” For further reading see <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/books/crucifixion/2.html>

² Deuteronomy 21:22-23 see also <http://www.theologynetwork.org/biblical-studies/going-on/the-messiah-who-was-cursed-on-the-tree.htm>.

Instead of judging people for their failures of faith – let us rather give courage to those who walk a shaky, unsure path towards faith.

For Thought:

<i>I believe, Lord, help my unbelief Give the vision that I may see That I am safe in your care</i>

<i>I believe, Lord, help my unbelief Won't You take every part of me Heal my cry, Help my unbelief</i>
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Larnelle Harris

Easter Sunday

Christ Lives

The Scripture passage for the day is drawn from Rueben Job and Norman Shawchuck, A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and other Servants, (Nashville, The Upper Room 1983), 142.

This reflection is from my own devotional exercises for the day. (Rev. Pete Grassow)