

Follow and Serve...

... as we watch and wait

A reflection given on Good Friday 10th April 2020, in the Online Service by the Curate, the Revd. Time Kelly

John 19:38-42

Jesus was dead. His lifeless body was still nailed to the cross. It was nighttime and the sky was dark. Consider for a moment the emotions that must have been present in this situation: huge confusion as to what was happening; disappointment in the one who was thought to be the Messiah; anxiety for what lay ahead; fear of persecution for Jesus' followers. Dark times indeed. Into this scene enters Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. In this moment it is these two characters that hold the thread of the continuing story. The crowds are gone and they are replaced by just two people – one a wealthy disciple of Jesus, and the other a Pharisee who was starting to see the truth in Jesus' teaching.

Nicodemus is often described as a timid character because of the way in which he previously visited Jesus by night (recounted in John chapter 3), and how he now secretly visits Jesus' body. However, this Good Friday I want to suggest the exact opposite of both Nicodemus and of Joseph. They are to be admired for their courage and their faithfulness. Nicodemus comes to help Joseph at great personal risk. Only hours after the questioning of Jesus by the High Priest, his 'defection' as one of the teachers of the law would have been viewed extremely harshly. Joseph of Arimathea didn't have to ask Pilate for permission to take down Jesus' body. Again, to do so was risky and would clearly identify himself as one of Jesus' followers, both to the Roman rulers and to any of the Jewish leaders that might have found out. Neither of them had to do what they did but yet they still did it. But, before we label them as superheroes, let's not pretend that they wouldn't have had their own doubts and conflicting emotions. The swirling confusion, disappointment, anxiety, and fear was almost certainly theirs too. They, just as much as anyone else, were experiencing the darkness of the moment. And yet, there was *something*, possibly only a tiny glimmer in their consciousness amongst all of that maelstrom of emotions, that compelled them to carry on. *Something* that called them to persist in following and

-serving their Lord in the only way they could in that moment, even when the way forward was uncertain. *Their* faith and their faithfulness are worthy of our admiration.

On *this* Good Friday in particular we may similarly be experiencing the darkness. The news tells us of people struggling under extreme pressure, loved ones suffering, people encountering separation and isolation. We may share the emotions of the psalmist in Psalm 10 when it says, “Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?” As Christians, it can sometimes be all too easy to simply point to the ending, in our case Easter Sunday, and triumphantly exclaim, “See ... everything is going to be alright”. Tony Campolo famously declared in his book, “It’s Friday but Sunday’s coming!” Of course, this is true. But to ‘skip to the end’ can sometimes deny the very real and human experience we encounter from day to day, the experience of Joseph and Nicodemus. “Sunday is coming, but today’s still Friday”, may be another way of expressing some of our present feelings about what we are experiencing. It is OK to weep for what we see and for what is lost, even when we know the ending of our Christian story. Many of the psalms offer companionship in our lament.

Looking at the example of Nicodemus and Joseph, our challenge is to continue to *follow* and to serve in the ways we know how, possibly even when we might not feel like doing so; to carry the thread of hope in the continuing story, not just for ourselves but also for others, even when we might not see an easy resolution to our present problems.

So this Good Friday as we watch and wait this day alongside Jesus in the tomb, let us pray for the courage and faithfulness of Nicodemus and Joseph.

Reading Texts

John 19:38-42

The Burial of Jesus 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.