

“The Beginning – He will see His offspring”

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Becoming the People of the Resurrection

Read Isaiah 53:10, 11; Mark 15:39-47

¹⁰“But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.

¹¹As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities” (Isa. 53:10, 11).

The crushing of the woman’s seed brings immeasurable suffering, yet from the darkness comes the dawn. In the depth of despair comes the bright light of hope. God does not leave us without escape. There is always the planting of seeds that bring light where there is despair and anguish of soul. The finished work of Christ and the torn veil bring light to the darkness. We now begin to see the first fruits of those who openly confess Jesus Christ as Lord of lords and King of kings. This is embodied in three individuals.

First, first fruits are embodied in the conversion of the centurion confessing Him as the Son of God (Mark 15:39 [“When the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him, saw the way He breathed His last, he said, ‘Truly this man was the Son of God’”). Although it is not recorded in Mark’s Gospel, we also have the conversion of the dying thief. Who was this centurion?

“The centurion in the infantry is chosen for his size, strength and dexterity in throwing his missile weapons and for his skill in the use of his sword and shield; in short for his expertness in all the exercises. He is to be vigilant, temperate, active and readier to execute the orders he receives than to talk; Strict in exercising and keeping up proper discipline among his soldiers, in obliging them to appear clean and well-dressed and to have their arms constantly rubbed and bright.” (Vegetius. *De Re Militari*, II, 14)
<http://www.pvv.ntnu.no/~madsb/home/war/vegetius/dere05.php#04> http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Centurion#cite_note-6

The centurion is well acquainted with death and dying. He is unmoved by the anguish of those who linger long in the grip of passing. He is familiar with the leaving of life and the draining of energy. Yet in the dying of this One, there is something markedly different. He is not ignorant of the claims or deaf to the words circulating and surrounding this One. God in His providence draws to Himself such as will be saved. For this centurion, now is the time, this is the place. He is the person whose confession brings redemption’s song and whose inclusion adopts him as a son of God.

Like much in Mark’s Gospel, individuals are engaged in the carrying out of the *Story* without their identity ever being noted. The rent veil speaks to the Jew, and now the inclusion of the Roman centurion speaks to the Gentile. God’s redemptive purpose is open to all.

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Second, although the male disciples forsook Him in His hour of need, the women disciples stood fast and with resolve received the scorn heaped upon their Lord and Savior (Mark 15:40, 41, 47 [⁴⁰ There were also some women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the Less and Joses, and Salome. ⁴¹ When He was in Galilee, they used to follow Him and minister to Him; and there were many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem"]).

There is a notable contrast between those who fled and those who followed. The men fled while the women followed. John notes how not all men were absent (John 19:25-27).

²⁵ "Therefore the soldiers did these things. But standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus then saw His mother, and **the disciple whom He loved standing nearby**, He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' ²⁷ Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' From that hour the disciple took her into his own household" (John 19:25-27).

Mark's account notes their persistency of abiding during their Lord's passage through the valley of the shadow of death.

Third, Joseph of Arimathea, with true grit and determination, openly received the battered, broken, and bloodied body of His Lord and Savior (Mark 15:42-46).

A native of Arimathea, in Judea, Joseph was apparently a man of wealth—and probably a member of the Sanhedrin, which is the way *bouleutēs*, literally "counsellor", in Matthew 27:57 and Luke 23:50 is most often interpreted. According to Mark 15:43, Joseph was an "honourable counsellor, who waited (or "was searching") for the kingdom of God". In John 19:38 he was secretly a disciple of Jesus: as soon as he heard the news of Jesus' death, he "went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus." This was done speedily, "for the Sabbath was drawing on". http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_of_Arimathea

Joseph seeks to follow protocol. There is an element of uncertainty with Joseph. He is not to blame. His training pushes him toward caution, but his heart and mind compel him to abandonment. He openly identifies himself as a follower of this "rebel" Rabbi. It is impossible to underestimate the impact his decision will have on himself and his family. Yet such choices and consequences are a necessary and expected outcome.

Each of these elements speaks of first fruits. Consider the metaphor of natural birth with that of the Seed's journey. The incarnation is the conception of the seed. His life is the gestation period and the cross is the labor pains. The life coming from this pregnancy is seen in the torn veil, the centurion's confession, Joseph's open stance, and the women disciples' determined devotion. Here is the prosperity noted by the prophet Isaiah. Our Lord sees the result of the anguish of soul and He is satisfied. Through this act, He will justify man. During our journey leading us to the cross and His resurrection from the dead, let us be mindful of those carefully placed markers encouraging us in our pursuit. In the darkness, there is a dawn. What we read is incentive enough, and let us remember how this is just . . . the beginning.

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