



The Crucifixion and Death of Jesus as told in Mark 15

²¹ They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. ²² Then they brought Jesus^[d] to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). ²³ And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. ²⁴ And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

²⁵ It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. ²⁶ The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." ²⁷ And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left.^[e] ²⁹ Those who passed by derided^[f] him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, ³⁰ save yourself, and come down from the cross!" ³¹ In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. ³² Let the Messiah,^[g] the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

³³ When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land^[h] until three in the afternoon. ³⁴ At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" ³⁵ When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." ³⁶ And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether

Elijah will come to take him down.”³⁷ Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.³⁸ And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.³⁹ Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was God’s Son!”



These are familiar words but we are reading them in unfamiliar circumstances. The fundamental message of supreme sacrifice and hope remains the same. However we may be able to see some parts of the narrative with a particular clarity at this time...

“At three o’clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” These words in Hebrew-tinged Aramaic and their translation are a version of Psalm 22:1. They are omitted in Luke and John and it may well be that they were an embarrassment to the early Church.

People have tried to explain them away by saying that Jesus really had the whole psalm in mind so these words were an expression of faith caught short by his weakness or that Jesus felt forsaken but wasn’t really forsaken... But to do this is to miss the real significance of what was happening. We must not forget how Jesus clearly submitted to God’s will in Gethsemane and also what is expressed by Paul, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God”. (2 Corinthians 5:21) The weight of the world’s sin and Jesus complete self-identification with sinners involved a real abandonment by God, (although it’s important that even

then the unity of the trinity somehow remained unbroken). Jesus' cry of dereliction testifies to the full horror of our disobedience. But there is a real sense in which even as this depth is reached the victory had been won and we can understand some of the meaning of Jesus' cry in his triumphant "It is finished" in John's account. (John 19:30)

We often lead busy lives full of encounters with others and for some of us isolation or loneliness are not realities we usually experience. We can never of course fully comprehend what happened on Good Friday, but perhaps during our current circumstances we can relate slightly more closely to what must have been a sense of supreme isolation on the cross. This year in relation to Palm Sunday I reflected on Jesus' being a lonely in a crowd as he was the only person fully aware of what was happening. But that sense of isolation was as nothing compared to the Friday. As we reflect on Jesus' death in preparation for our Sunday celebrations let's not forget that Jesus truly understands what it is to be lonely and has himself plumbed the very depths of human experience. In him we have the hope we so desperately need.

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