

DEVOTION FOR GOOD FRIDAY

Bible Reading

John 19.16-30

The king is crucified

He [Jesus] went out, carrying his cross, and came to 'The place of the Skull', as it is called. (Golgotha) There they crucified him; and they also crucified two other men, one on each side, with Jesus between them. Pilate wrote a notice and put it on the cross. 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews'.

It is heart wrenching to read of the brutality the Roman soldiers showed toward Jesus, who had come as a humble and gentle man bringing healing and hope to thousands. Yet they did crucify him, on the insistence of the Jewish leaders of his day. Pilate had thought that the priests would be appeased when he had Jesus whipped and mocked as a king, for he would have looked pathetic and weak, certainly no threat to Rome or their Sanhedrin in that state. However, the people shout crucify him, because they did not recognise him as their king.

However, Pilate put up a notice on his cross the title, 'King of the Jews' in all three ancient languages: Hebrew, the language of the Jewish people, Greek, the language of their culture and spoken by everyone, and Latin, the official political language of the state. Proclaiming Jesus as king in all these realms fulfilled Jesus' prophecy that he would draw **everyone** to himself when he was 'lifted up' from the earth. The chief priests were offended that Jesus should be identified in this way and they want to insert 'this man said he was...' But Pilate refuses. He seemed to have moved from mocking Jesus to bearing him a grudging respect throughout the trials yet still was persuaded by the crowds to have him executed.

Despite the injustice and the horror of the crucifixion, John's recording of Jesus' death shows Jesus was still in control. He looked at his mother and the 'beloved disciple' (probably John) and gave him the role of son to her - even in great agony Jesus ensured that his mother would be cared for after he was gone. Then Jesus cried out that he was thirsty. He was the one who claimed to offer the water of life and he is given a sponge of hyssop, in fulfilment of the Scriptures Psalm 69.21 And finally Jesus declared, 'It is finished' before he dies. It appears as if he was another false Messiah, that everything of his ministry has been a failure, but if read in a deeper way 'It is finished' says it is accomplished, all brought to a final conclusion. Jesus was still in control - no one took his life; he gave it up. When Jesus died, he handed over his spirit, as he promised, it is 'to your advantage that I go away' so that he could pour the gift of his Spirit upon his followers.

We do not know what it took for Jesus to offer his life for the world, but we do know that he followed his calling right to the end. This meant that he accomplished all that he came to do, to conquer evil and all its consequences of disease, destruction and death.

Prayer

Lord, we acknowledge you as king above all kings, Lord above all Lords. Even during this dreadful pandemic. We know that your presence is near, and that you weep with those who weep and sigh with those who sigh, and acknowledge all those who help others, as if helping you. Help us to remain your faithful people, to trust that one day you will eliminate all death and tears. Give us your strength that withstood such agony on our behalf. And may we be your faithful people, right to the end. AMEN.