

April 14, 2017 – THE PASSION STORY

JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA (speaking quietly and firmly):

Hello. My name is Joseph; I am from Arimathea. You know, no one knows where that town was. Perhaps that's best – my part in the gospels is a small one, almost an insignificant one. Where I come from is not important.

And yet, all four gospels tell how I was present at the time of the crucifixion. I didn't do much – indeed, no one really knew I liked Jesus' stories. I liked his message. I liked the things he taught. But, you understand, I was important in the community. I had status and money. What would people have said if I had spoken up for him? I was a member of the council, you see, and could have voted against putting him to death. But then so could Nicodemus, and he didn't either. It wasn't worth it.

Or was it? I wish I knew. So I did the best I could – I offered my tomb. Some will say, "too little, too late" And perhaps they are right. But it was something, I suppose.

So come, on this sad and heavy day, and listen again to the story. And imagine your place in it all. Reflect with me on how we could do things differently, on how the things we say and do proclaim the words of Jesus in our world.

Hymn MV #64 Because You Came - verse 2

Scripture: John 18:1-27

MARY, WIFE OF CLOPAS:

I was one of the women who watched – who dared to stand until the end. I watched them nail Jesus to a cross, watched them abuse him to death. You have no idea what it was like, but I knew I had to stay there – to support his mother, and Mary Magdalene, and stand witness that, just as Jesus would not run away, we would not, either.

So many times we let Jesus down. We ignored and even refused his requests. On the night of Jesus' arrest one of our leaders, Simon Peter, denied him three times. Our group of disciples tried hard to follow him faithfully, but sometimes what he asked just seemed too much: to travel to distant towns, to leave our families, to let go of all our belongings, to defy the leaders of the synagogue, to put ourselves in danger.

We had ignored Jesus so many times before, but we loved him and this was one time we could not run away and leave him alone.

Hymn MV #64 verse 1

Scripture: John 18:28-19:16a

PILATE:

I am Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor. Yes, I know, you think I could have stopped it. And maybe I could have – I do have a lot of power in this city. But the

crowd was so huge, and their anger was so intense. I'm sure you know what that's like – the newspapers are full of stories of masses of people carrying a mood to extremes. I mean, I know I had the army and all that. I am used to fighting battles. But there must have been hundreds, even thousands of them. I could only do so much, you know?

I asked him why he was there, what it was all about. Was he trying to overthrow me? Did he want to sit on a throne somewhere? His answers didn't make any sense: "I'm here to proclaim the truth," he said. I don't have time for that! I have to maintain order and discipline.

They could have had me release him, but they cried out for Barabbas. My hands were tied. You know what that's like, don't you? Some boats are just not worth rocking.

Hymn: MV #64 verse 3

Scripture: John 19: 16b-30

MARY, MOTHER OF JESUS:

I am Jesus' mother. Perhaps you are only used to me as a quiet character in the Christmas story. But I never went away – I stayed with Jesus through his ministry, challenging him when he needed it, and comforting him when he needed it.

You will meet me again in one of the first stories of the early church, where I was a part of the group that decided we would carry on. I could only do that because I was there this day.

I was there to watch as the Jesus was taken from the garden. I was there, in the crowd, when they shouted, “Crucify him!”

I was there, when the soldiers nailed him to the cross.

Like Mary, the wife of Clopas, I could not turn my head away – I stood and watched. Do you know what it is like to watch your child die? To stand helpless as they beat him almost senseless, and caused him pain beyond my worst imagining? But I stayed. There was nowhere to go.

Musical Offering: A Body, Broken on a Cross

Scripture: John 19:31-40

NICODEMUS:

It is only John who tells my story – three small glimpses – but they say so much. Perhaps you can relate.

My name is Nicodemus; you may recall that I went to see Jesus one night, filled with questions. What did he mean by being born again? Was someone like me –

a leader of the people, an upstanding figure in the religious community, someone who had studied long and hard to find answers to life's problems – was I supposed to start over? It seemed preposterous.

He said something curious to me: God's Spirit goes where it will. It does what it wants – does what it must. I didn't really understand it then.

Sometime later when Jesus was speaking in Jerusalem, people were arguing: could he be the Messiah? I wanted the other leaders to give him a fair hearing, but they just sneered and said "the Messiah can't come from Galilee." I held my tongue after that. And look where it brought us: to this moment.

It was with a heavy heart that I brought some myrrh and ointment for his body. How might things have happened if I had acted differently? What if I had spoken up and said, "he doesn't deserve to die"? What then? I was afraid they would kill him anyway, and perhaps me as well (pause). Now I suppose we'll never know.

Hymn: MV #64 verse 4

Scripture: John 19:41-42

MARY MAGDALENE:

I, too, was one of the women who stayed. What else could I do? Jesus had changed my life beyond measure.

I was despised before I met Jesus, and after as well. My name is Mary and I come from Magdala. I was one of the women who followed Jesus, and we were not treated well. As Jesus spoke of how God's view of the world included all people, we felt welcome. The men tried to include us, but they had grown up in a world that didn't give us much time and attention, and sometimes they resented that there were women in the group of followers.

I had struggled for many years with ailments that made it hard to function. Some say I had demons; I only know that I would have fits from time to time, and Jesus put an end to them. I was forever grateful, and stayed with him out of appreciation for what he had done. I wanted others to know that the message he brought and the things he did offered new life and new hope to all of us.

And yet I also knew that it would not last. No one can proclaim the things that Jesus did without raising serious opposition. No one can keep declaring that God's love is for all people, without those in power and control needing to put a stop to it. Imagine! If the world understood that we are all sisters and brothers in God's family, what might it be like?

History has not been kind to me – because I was such a powerful testimony to the message Jesus brought, they discredited me, claiming I was a prostitute and calling me all sorts of horrible things. As you know, that's not the story the Bible tells. Only that I was Jesus' friend.

I will come back. When the Sabbath is over, I shall return to this tomb, and spend time with Jesus once again. I will come here often, and pray that he might still speak to me and guide me. Will you do that, too?

Hymn: MV #64 verse 5

Adapted from: *Seasons of the Spirit™* SeasonsFusion Lent • Easter 2017, page 99-100.