

TUESDAY COMMUNION

Hymn: 176 O sacred head, sore wounded.

Reading: Mark 15. 40-47

Prayers:

It seems late in the day to mention them but it is just as Jesus has died and the Roman centurion has declared, "Truly this man was God's son" that Mark mentions the women who were there.

The male disciples have fled but there were women who looked upon this scene from a distance. These were women who had been with Jesus from the time of his ministry in Galilee. They were women with the financial means to help support him and his male disciples and two of those he mentions were presumably known to the Christians for whom Mark was writing.

These women stand at a distance and one feels their sense of helplessness and grief. There is nothing they can do. They have watched Jesus die and now he is dead. Have they been mistaken in seeing him as the one from God who had come to transform the life of Israel?

They must have wondered if they had been wrong about Jesus. If he had been the Christ, the Messiah, surely God would have acted to save him? So we see them standing and watching with their grief and their questions.

One man who acts and acts rapidly is Joseph from the town of Arimathea, a respected member of the Jewish Sanhedrin. We can't be sure whether he acts out of commitment to Jesus or out of his desire to fulfil the requirement of the law that a convicted criminal should be buried before sunset and the beginning of the Sabbath day.

For whatever reason, he has the courage to ask Pilate for the body to be released to him for burial. Often the Romans kept the bodies on the crosses for weeks so that they could be a warning to anyone who rebelled against Rome as to what would happen to them if they tried!

But Pilate gives his permission and Joseph buys a linen cloth in which to wrap Jesus in preparation for his burial.

Some of the world's most sensitive and beautiful works of art show Mary, the mother of Jesus, cradling the body of her son. Here is the boy to whom she has given life, for whom she has cared physically, mentally and spiritually, in whom she has delighted, and yet has also caused her pain and anxiety.

Here is the boy who was so close to God who she has loved with understanding and bewilderment, lying dead in her arms.

What sorrow!

It is tempting to move forward in our story and to speak of resurrection but in many ways that is a copout. We have to face grief for what it is. CS Lewis, a fine Christian, tells in his book, "A Grief Observed" how he felt when his much loved wife died.

People tried to console him and spoke to him of resurrection and of how his wife was held in the love of God but at that time the aching heart and the pain of loss was too great for such comfort. He needed people who would just be there with him and hold him with their fellow feeling. In time, yes CS Lewis did come to feel and to know that his wife was alive and, in some sense, still with him but that came later!

What CS Lewis experienced (and countless others) says to me is that it is so important to try and understand, in some small measure, what those who have been closest to a person who has died, are feeling and not to push our well intentioned words of comfort on them.

Often, I suspect, it is the presence of the good friend that provides the initial comfort. They may say little but they are there, willing to help or to be still as required, to come and to go as they are needed.

The Pieta, Mary holding the limp body of her son reminds us of all who suffer this day:

- in the fires in Australia and the civilian bombings in Afghanistan,
- in the wars and violence of Sri Lanka and the Darfur,
- the Congo and Zimbabwe,
- and those who grieve in our own midst.

May we share in the work of Christ who wept with those who weep and went to be with those who grieved.

Amen