

Along the track

The Cross

Two others also, who were criminals, were being led away to be put to death with Him. When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left.... Luke 23:33

Now we can begin to understand you, Lord, and maybe it is too late.
You spoke out too much; it wasn't wise to call them "a brood of vipers" with hearts that were nothing more than whitened sepulchres, fine exteriors but full of corruption. Not a wise move.
You chose the company of lepers, strangers and despised foreigners.
You even ate with notorious sinners and You invited prostitutes into your band of followers. Not a wise move.
You got on well with the poor, the sick, the homeless.
You challenged those religious regulations that did not speak of love and forgiveness and compassion. Not a wise move.
Hours of agony and pain. Insults and mockery right until the end. Your enemies just couldn't let it go.

How can you do this, Lord? They have plotted against you, planned and manipulated. They have tried to trick You, finding ways so You can condemn yourself. In the finish, You were too much of a threat. You had to be removed. Despite Your healings, Your love and compassion, Your seeking out the lost and the lonely, You were a threat.

The soldiers act quickly. They have done it so many times before. No time to protest innocence, no way to escape. They are efficient, they know what they are doing. Nothing special about this one. Get it over as fast as possible. Like a lamb to the slaughter, the scripture says. Stripped bare, lie prostrate and helpless, nailed to the cross bar and hauled up. Nail the feet. Wait until it is over.

But even then You cannot help yourself. You forgive Your executioners, those who have manipulated and connived to ensure this happens. You think the best of their motives – forgive them for they don't know what they are doing! You forgive the ones crucified with You – today you will be with me in paradise.

Then one final, last act. John, look after my mother. Mary, look after John.

Now they have had their day.
Jesus finally dies. Darkness comes.

How do those who deserted Jesus feel at this moment. The final act is over, He is finally taken down after this dreadful ordeal. Even to the end He was still the Jesus they had come to know and love. Determined, forgiving, compassionate.

And where we were? It is over, the dream is gone, all the efforts over the past three years, the hopes and visions dashed. We loved Him, He inspired us, He filled our hearts with passion, we could even heal in His name – oh, such hopes. And now he is gone. And we deserted Him when he needed us. What was it all about?!

And now, they take You down and put You in Your mother's arms.

You can leave Your Cross.

Your mother takes You in her arms and finally You rest in peace. Your work is done.

It is accomplished. You can come down to rest, You have surely earned it.

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. And Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock; and he rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb. (Matt 27:57)

'Let us take him to his place of rest', we say at the end of the burial service. But for Jesus there are no crowds of mourners, no eulogies, nothing to celebrate his life, no flowers or fanfare. Just this little procession of mourners for the greatest person who ever lived.

At the end of my life, how will I die? Will I be angry, unforgiving and bitter at the unfairness of life? Or, will I have a forgiving and grateful heart. Will I be compassionate? This is not just one, major choice, a final option I face at the hour of death; it is also a choice I must face daily, many times daily, in my countless interactions with others, family, colleagues, friends, with those I encounter along the track. I hold grudges. You didn't. Surely You had more right to than me and my petty difficulties and imagined slights. Perhaps I wasn't thanked properly, this one didn't praise me enough, this one was rude, that one ignored me.

Regards
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