
Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

May 11, 2014

What God Does for Us (*Location: Via Dolorosa*)

“When Pilate heard these words, he led Jesus out and seated Him on the judge’s bench at the place called Stone Pavement. It was about noon on the Preparation Day for the Passover. Pilate said to the Jewish leaders, ‘Here’s your king.’”

John 19: 13, 14 (Common English Bible)

Via Dolorosa means, the way of the cross. Historians and archaeologists disagree over the precise route that awful procession would have taken; the route Jesus took to the cross. What is certain is that it would become a route marked with grief. But the route to the cross began from a place known as the Stone Pavement, part of the Tower of Antonia bordering the northwest corner of the Temple complex. It is here that Jesus is tried before Pilate. It is here that Jesus is sentenced to flogging and crucifixion.

Jesus walked the Via Dolorosa alone. The twelve men who shared in Jesus’ ministry, the twelve who shared a meal with Jesus only the night before are not with Him. What is likely is that they are hiding behind a locked door, questioning the abrupt arrest of Jesus and what that now meant for them. Specifics of their location are unavailable – only that they were not with Jesus. Perhaps they were experiencing shame, horror and disbelief. Their golden dream has now turned into a nightmare.

N. T. Wright, that wonderful teacher of our faith, says that the absence of the disciples is important. Jesus had to walk the Via Dolorosa alone. It is a major problem in Christian devotion, suggests Wright, that when we think of the way of the cross we so often think of Jesus as the great example, with ourselves simply imitating Him. Actually, central to our faith is the conviction that Jesus must do for us what we cannot. An important point of the Via Dolorosa is that Jesus must walk it alone.

Jesus suffers so that others need not; Jesus dies so that others may not. Pilgrims who walk the Via Dolorosa today do so for many reasons. Some make the journey out of simple curiosity. Others wish to shop the endless souvenirs that are sold along the route. All jostle in the narrow streets and alleyways. But perhaps an authentic walk along the Via Dolorosa is one where we realize that here Jesus walked on our behalf, that this way of grief was an achievement, an accomplishment that could only be completed by God’s Son. This is a walk best completed in silence and reverence.

Grant, this day, O God, a renewed sense of awe and reverence for what You accomplished for me in the way of the cross, the journey of grief. Amen.

Doug Hood

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