

15. Matthew 27:32 - 28:20

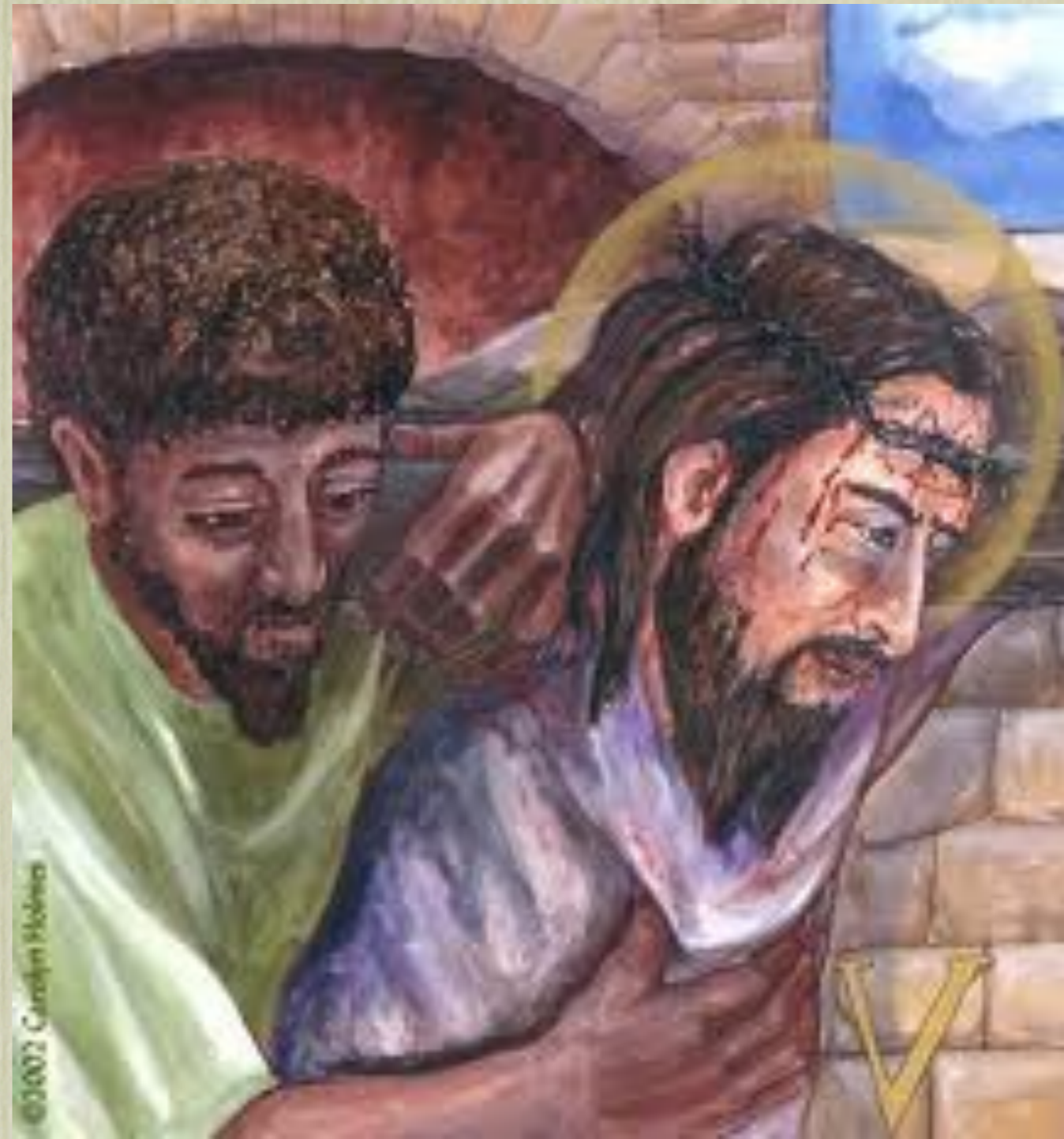


Matthew 27:32 (see Mark 15:21)



As they went out,
they came upon a
man from Cyrene
named Simon;
they compelled this
man to carry his
cross.

Jesus said once: 'If you want to be my disciple, you must deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me'(Matthew 16:24). Simon was reluctant but it seems that he became a disciple, for Paul, in his letter to the Christian community in Rome, writes: 'Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; and greet his mother – a mother to me also.' The gratitude and love shown him by Jesus must have changed his heart so that he came to see his task as a privilege.



If Jesus needed someone to help him carry his cross, we should not be surprised if we find it too hard to carry our cross alone. In our case, some of our crosses are the result of our own foolishness and sin. Sometimes, however, like Jesus, we find ourselves weighed down with crosses that have been laid upon us unjustly by others who may or may not know what they are doing.





The Crucifixion : Matthew 27:33-36 (see Mark 15:22-26)

When they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall (Psalm 69:21); but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves (Psalm 22:19) *by casting lots; then they sat down there and kept watch over him.*

‘They divide my clothes among themselves,
and for my robe they cast lots’ (Psalm 22:18).

Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.”

Jesus Nazarenus Rex Iudeorum (John 19:19)



‘How can we be so blind and so callous as to nail to a cross hands that have only ever been raised in blessing, hands that have touched our eyes to bring sight, arms that have embraced in order to bring healing and comfort. How could we ever think of nailing to a cross feet that have walked with us on our journey, encouraging us, and bringing us hope by liberating us from the fears that can so easily trap us. What this body makes visible is the twisted shape of hearts, created for love, chosen for love, that yet offer every insult to love, attempt every abuse of its secret and holy nakedness ... His whole body shouts shame, has become the utter shame of mankind’ (Hans Urs Von Balthasar).

The Crucifixion : Matthew 27:38-44 (see Mark 15:27-32)



Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him (Psalm 22:6-8), shaking their heads and saying, “You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days (26:61), save yourself! *If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.*”

In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. *He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to* (Psalm 22:8); *for he said, ‘I am God’s Son* (Wisdom 2:18).” The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.

The Death of the Son of God : Matthew 27:45-50 (see Mark 15:33-37)

From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. And about ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me (Psalm 22:1)?” When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, “This man is calling for Elijah.” At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink (Psalm 69:21). But the others said, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.” Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and gave up the Spirit.

‘On that day, says the Lord God, the sun will set at midday, and the light will grow dark upon the land at daytime’(Amos 8:9).

Virgil says that the sun “expressed mercy for Rome when Caesar was killed; he hid his shining head in gloom and the impious age feared eternal night” (Georgics 1.468).

Psalm 22:1

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

‘This man is calling on Elijah’(27:47)

Psalm 22:10

Since my mother bore me you have been my God.

אֱלֹהֵי אֲתָהּ

Eli ‘atta My God, it is You!

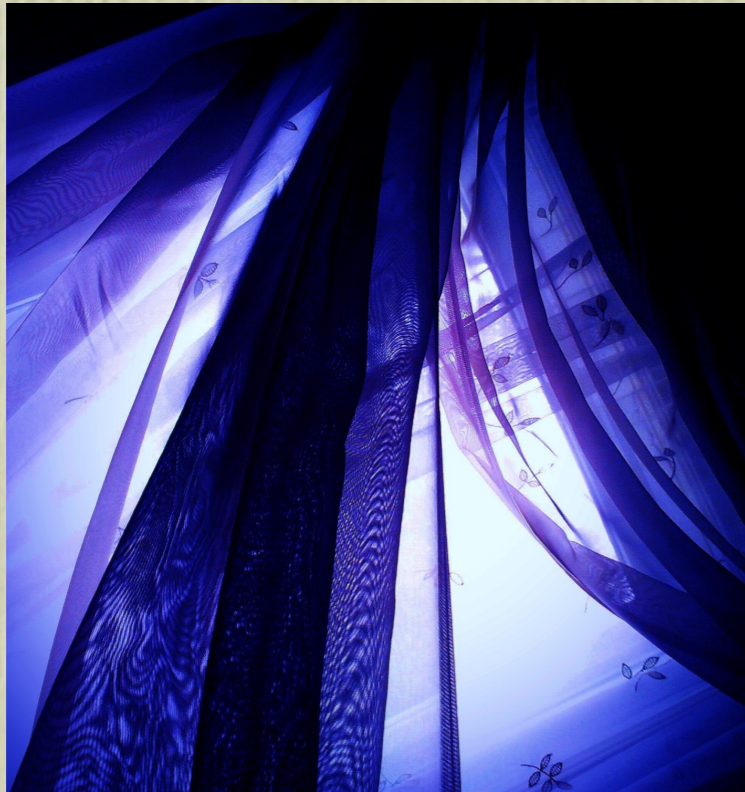
אֱלִיָּהּ תֵּה

Elia ta Elijah, Come!

Matthew 27:51

(Mark 15:38)

At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. (Hebrews 10:19-20).



Hans Urs Von Balthasar

‘The one who embraces the cross is always alone, looking up at one who is not looking down, but who is in turn looking up towards the God who seems to have forsaken them both. He shares our feeling of being abandoned, and offers us with himself to the Father. Those words he spoke – that the Father should forgive them; that his soul is commended to God; that his companion in death should share paradise with him; that our mother is his mother; that he thirsts; that, truly, all has been accomplished – those words have meaning only because he knows what it feels like to be abandoned and to continue to trust. Many stand around; some with magnificent gesture, some alert, waiting, speculating, all sensing that something may happen yet which concerns them. Because there is one unanswered question here: Is God ultimately revealed? If Yes, it must be God’s love which makes him cry out with us to the one he cannot see, ‘But why? Why have you forsaken me?’ Let that be God’s question to you!’

At the Death of the Son of God : Matthew 27:52-53

The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many.

The association of earthquake with mighty acts of God is traditional (Judges 5:4; Isaiah 2:19; 5:25; 24:18; Ezekiel 38:19; Joel 2:10; Jeremiah 4:23-24; Zechariah 14:4; Nahum 1:5-6; also Matthew 24:7).

The opening of tombs and the raising of the dead recalls the words of Ezekiel 37:12-13. 'Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people.'

Matthew is demonstrating the significance of Jesus' death by appealing to symbolic, apocalyptic imagery (compare Acts 2:19-20). At the end of his prologue, Matthew quoted from Isaiah 4:16

The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.

At Jesus' death the gates of Hades are opened and life penetrates the darkness of death bringing life to those who died in holiness. Since Jesus is the 'first-born from the dead' (Colossians 1:18), Matthew adds that it was after Jesus' resurrection that these saints appeared.



The Centurion : Matthew 27:54 (see Mark 15:39)

Now when the centurion *and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus*, saw the earthquake and what took place, they *were terrified and* said, “Truly this man was God’s Son!” (see 3:17; 17:15; also 14:33)

Disciples on Calvary : Matthew 27:55-56 (see Mark 15:40-41)

Many women were also there, looking on (θεωρω) from a distance (see 26:58, Peter); they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for (διακονεω) him. Among them were (1) Mary Magdalene, (2) Mary the mother of James and Joseph (13:55), and (3) the mother of the sons of Zebedee (20:20).

Mark 15:40-41 There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were (1) Mary Magdalene, and (2) Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and (3) Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

Luke 23:49, 24:10 All his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things ... (1) Mary Magdalene, Joanna (see 8:3), (2) Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them.'

John 19:25 Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and (3) his mother's sister, (2) Mary the wife of Clopas, and (1) Mary Magdalene.

Jesus is buried : Matthew 27:57-61 (see Mark 15:42-47)

When it was evening, there came a rich man from **Arimathea**, named **Joseph**, *who was also a disciple of Jesus*. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb (1Cor 15:4), which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene (1) and the other Mary (2) were there, sitting opposite the tomb.



Giotto



Joseph is willing to stand apart from the other members of the Jewish Council. In burying Jesus' body he incurs ritual defilement, and will not be able to celebrate the Passover. He has waited expectantly for the kingdom of God, and he has seen it in the self-giving love of the Servant-Messiah. He chooses to risk everything to go with Jesus, and so is a symbol for all those of Jesus' own people who would recognise Jesus as their Messiah. The Sabbath is beginning, the day on which God rests, having completed his creating. We have a foretaste of the new creation in Jesus' preaching and in his healing ministry. Now, as the women prepare the spices for a proper ritual burial, we wait in silence, wondering what the dawning of a new day will reveal.

Guards at the tomb : Matthew 27:62-66

The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, “Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, ‘He has been raised from the dead,’ and the last deception would be worse than the first.” Pilate said to them, “You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can.” So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

‘This is no historical report; it is a polemical legend told by Christians for Christians or, more precisely, a fiction largely created by Matthew for his readers’ (Luz volume 3. 587)

THE RESURRECTION NARRATIVE

Matthew 28

Jesus' death marked for him, as it does for us all, the end of the only kind of existence of which we human beings have direct sensory experience.

From the beginning of recorded time, however, we find an expectation that death marks a horizon but not an end of our existence (see Egypt).

We have already seen that there was a difference of opinion among Jesus' contemporaries concerning life after death (e.g., the Sadducees 22:23).

Jesus himself believed that beyond the grave we would experience life, that is to say communion with God. His belief was based on a conviction which he had about God who, having given life, would not withdraw the gift (20:38).

The fierce opposition which Jesus encountered led him to warn his followers of the death that was surely awaiting him in Jerusalem.

However, he did not fail to share with them also his trust that God would raise him to life ‘on the third day’ (see the commentary on 16:21).

That Jesus was, indeed, raised to life by God
is at the very centre of Christian belief.
This is clear from the whole of the New Testament.

Paul is also clear that:

‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,
nor has the human heart conceived
what God has prepared for those who love God’(1Corinthians 2:9).

Having stressed that belief in the resurrection of Jesus, and so belief that this is what God has in store for us is essential to Christian belief, Paul goes on to assert:

1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-44

‘But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” That is a foolish question! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be ... God gives a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body ... So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body.’

When we read the accounts of the post-crucifixion experiences of Jesus' disciples, we are not reading accurate descriptions of events. Rather we are reading dramatic accounts of experiences: accounts which include the meaning these experiences had for Jesus' disciples, and the meaning these experiences came to have in the life of the Christian communities.

Women at the tomb : Matthew 28:1 (see Mark 16:1)

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (27:56) went to see the tomb.

Matthew 28:2-4

Suddenly there was a great earthquake (see 27:51); for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men.

Matthew 28:5-8 (see Mark 16:6-8)

But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said (16:21; 17:22-23; 20:18-19). Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee (26:32); there you will see him.’ This is my message for you.” So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

Tell my brothers: Matthew 28:9-10

Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers (12:50) to go to Galilee (26:32; 28:7); there they will see me.”





‘The Resurrection expresses to the limit paeans of joy, exultations of triumph, the rainbow after sheets of blinding rain, golden sunshine after the gloom, the dance of dawn on the rim of darkness, and the glad sound of all creation singing together. It is the complete orchestration of happiness. Jesus is risen! The tomb could not hold him. He does not belong to the world of the dead. He is risen!’ (Pat O’Carrigan msc)

The guards : Matthew 28:11-15

While they were going, some of the guard went into the city and told the **chief priests** everything that had happened. After the priests had assembled with the elders, they devised a plan to give a large sum of money to the soldiers, telling them, “You must say, ‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ If this comes to the governor’s ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story is still told among the Jews to this day.

‘The experience of the no to Jesus of Israel’s large majority is still new; the parousia of the judge of the world is near (see 24:29), and the Lord’s mission to his church now to proclaim his commandments to all nations is more important than everything else. The evangelist wants to lead his readers to obedience to him’ (Luz, volume 3, 613).

Gospel conclusion : Matthew 28:16-20

THE UNIVERSAL MISSION OF THE DISCIPLES OF THE RISEN CHRIST

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

Temptation (4:8-9); new Torah (5:1); transfiguration (17:7)

When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, 'All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you (1:23) always, to the end of the age.'

(9:15; 17:17; 18:20; 26:11, 18, 20, 23, 29, 36, 38, 40, 51, 69, 71)