

John 18:1 – 19:42  
St Mark – April 7, 2023  
Good Friday  
Michelle Cox

### **We killed him**

We had the strangest visitor. He stopped at my father's house. It was very hot and we'd come in from the field to escape the heat of the afternoon.

The man looked strange. Like he was puzzled, thinking of something that troubled him. Not really confused, but deeply in thought. My father noticed his ring, the ring that marked him as a Centurion. He had the look of a Roman, but he wasn't dressed like one. He wore the simple clothes of a traveler.

He wanted no food, but welcomed the water that was offered. And then suddenly he began to tell his story. This is what he said.

I've seen more horrors (some of them at my own hand) than most men have ever seen. Brutality and pain, (both inflicted and endured), have been my companions for many years and in the end what Pilate commands I do.

The title of Centurion came to me after many years of serving under my own Centurion. I always knew he had 100 men under his command and I always strived to rise to his rank. Now that I have I question what some call this 'honor'.

I wasn't with them in the garden. That night I rested. I'd been even busier than usual since this Messiah came to Jerusalem.

The Jews had been causing confusion and stirring up their typically submissive community. They'd been spreading rumors that their Messiah had come, their savior, their conqueror. The son of their God.

They called him Jesus.

These conquered people expected him to be a king, but from what I hear he wasn't acting like a king.

Of course, that didn't matter to Rome.

Pilate and every other Roman prefect has been careful to put down anyone that even might challenge the Emperor and a king certainly would. The Emperor doesn't allow any challenges to his power and these prefects are afraid of the Emperor. As well they should be.

But there was something different about this man, this Jesus. Pilate seemed unnerved by him, unsure of what to do about him.

Yesterday or the day before, I've lost track of time. Pilate didn't even want to talk to him. He wanted the Jews to take care of their own 'mess' as he called it.

The leaders of the Jews, Pharisees they're called, they didn't like Jesus either. He was telling them that his kingdom was not of this world or something like that and he didn't care about finery or comforts or even taxes. I heard he said that his followers were to give to Tiberius Caesar what was demanded and that was very strange to hear coming from a Jew.

Even still, anyone claiming to be a king wasn't going to make the Emperor happy.

There were rumors of putting this Jesus to death. The Jews couldn't easily do that, their laws only allowed it in the Temple and only under the most strict of situations and so I knew that Pilate would be called on ... if it came putting him to death.

My men were weary from battle and now for more than a week this uprising demanded even more of them.

The arrest and trial was a political mockery. With it came torture and brutality, the typical stock in trade for Pilate and this time it was worse than even I had seen and of course it was I who was required to carry out Pilate's verdict.

The arrest took place in the Garden at Gethsemane when a man close to Jesus betrayed him. He was paid well and then he killed himself. I've heard rumors that he killed himself because he knew that Jesus, the one he betrayed, was the son of the one and only true God.

There are other strange things I've heard told about Jesus. Told by many.

He's done miracles. Healed people who couldn't be healed. Fed thousands with a loaf of bread. I even heard he brought a friend of his back from the dead.

His trial, if you could call it that, took place only after the Pharisees and Pilate argued about who would 'deal' with this man. Like always, they were obsessed with power and they wanted to keep it. Neither wanted anything to do with him and the problem he created. Were they just more worried about losing their own power and status than putting an innocent man, a holy man to death?

Now I wonder, did they know who he really was all along?

Pilate finally found him guilty and sentenced him to death. Death on the cross and not hanging by ropes, but by nails driven through his hands and feet. The most brutal of this most brutal punishment. They made him carry the cross beam through the streets and up the hill. It was sickening to watch and I only saw that horror from a distance.

I was near him throughout the hours he hung there. Checking on the men I had ordered to stand guard. In his final hours he said things as life was leaving him.

"Father forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34) I heard someone say that he was talking to God. Such a strange time to ask for his tormentors to be forgiven and that wasn't the only thing I heard that amazed me.

The criminal next to him was mocking him, but the criminal on the other side wanted to be with Jesus after he died and Jesus told him "today you will be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43) At that moment the criminal seemed to be transformed, at peace, no longer struggling as the life drained from his body. I found myself, for just a moment, jealous of the man. I wanted the peace that Jesus gave him.

So many people were watching. For some it was a just a show, entertainment. I'm always amazed at how many come to see a man tortured and especially tortured to death. Blood lust and nothing more.

But there were some in the crowd who loved him.

One of the soldiers reported to me that he spoke to his mother and told one of his followers to take her as his own mother and to her he said that this follower of his was now her son. (John 19:25-27)

All these words, the kindness, the concern he had for others, it was unheard of. No one ever spoke such words on that awful hill. Not until Jesus.

As he weakened, with sun burning him like a torch he cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34; Psalm 22:1) Someone in the crowd said he was quoting one of their scriptures. A psalm they said and then he was thirsty. (John 19:28) No wonder after all he’d been through.

At last he said, “It is finished.” (John 19:30) and then, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” (Luke 23:44-49)

I will never forget any of this. Jesus was the son of God and I didn’t care who heard me say it after I gave the order to drive a sword into his side.

Jesus was the son of God and making sure he was dead was the most merciful thing I could do.

Jesus was the son of God and we killed him.