

“What Can I Do Today To Serve My Lord?”

Mark 15:1-47

Throughout this Lenten Season, in our Gospel readings, we have seen some of the, shall we say, “great, but not so great followers of Jesus.” We have seen Peter make his confession of faith “You are the Christ” and then rebuke Jesus when He tells His disciples why the Christ has come (to suffer and die as the final sacrifice for the sins of the world and in three days rise from the dead).

Last week, we heard James and John ask Jesus for the places of honor (one at His right and one at His left) when He comes into His glory. They had no idea what they were asking. They would later become great champions of the faith and James would be the first of the disciples to be killed for proclaiming Jesus is risen from the dead.

The point being that even these great men of faith endured failures along the way. You have failed in life. You will fail in life. Christ died to take away your failure. Thanks be to God that you and I are not judged by the snapshot of those moments in life.

Continuing that theme, we hear of someone who would fit into the same category – Joseph of Arimathea. After Jesus died,

Joseph really stepped up to the plate. He took courage and went to Pontius Pilate to ask for Jesus' body. Having his request granted, Joseph bought a linen shroud, and he buried him in his own tomb which had been hewn out of rock. Joseph's connection and devotion to Jesus would no longer be hidden.

This also was a great sacrifice on his part, because, having touched a dead body, Joseph would be ceremonially unclean and forbidden from participating in the Passover festivities. He could not go home, because then his family would be ceremonially unclean. As I said, Joseph really stepped up to the plate.

But where was he in the days before? He, along with Nicodemus, were members of the Sanhedrin, the Council of 70 Elders who wielded great control over the people and specifically the religious life of the Jews. Joseph of Arimathea was a respected member of the Council – the same Council to whom Caiaphas had said concerning Jesus, "It is better for one man to die for the people, than for the entire nation to perish."

Up until this moment when Joseph took courage and requested the body of Jesus, he had kept his faith hidden. He had been silent, offering no defense. We can assume, like Nicodemus who came to speak to Jesus at night – under cover of darkness, that Joseph's contact with him had been behind the scenes or at a distance.

When we step back and take a look at any of Jesus'

disciples, all of them had characteristics which allow us to identify with them. Joseph of Arimathea is certainly no different. It can be difficult to stand up for what you believe when those around you do not share your faith. However, Christ's Church is not built on the crowds of Palm Sunday who shout and sing "Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest."

It was easy to be a part of that crowd. But many of them on Friday morning were probably also a part of the crowd yelling "Crucify Him!" It is always easy to go along with what the crowd is doing. It takes courage to stand up and speak up, especially when those around you are your friends and neighbors.

Joseph of Arimathea eventually took courage and acted upon his faith. And he did this after Jesus' death when logic would dictate that any action would be futile. Why expose yourself now? Stay hidden in the shadows. Caiaphas will never know that you were one of His disciples. He's dead. It's over.

Although it is unclear what Joseph's understanding of the resurrection fully entailed – after all, even the 12 were unclear about Him rising from the dead – even after Jesus clearly explained it to them on a number of occasions. However, although Jesus was dead and no one would ever have to know that Joseph was a follower of Him, as Mark records, Joseph was "looking for the kingdom of God." The real Kingdom of God. The

Kingdom we talked about in last week's Sunday morning Bible class. A Kingdom without borders; a Kingdom where God's will is done "on earth as it is in heaven."

Jesus may be dead, but Joseph's faith in God is unshaken. God was still watching. Just because Joseph had failed to speak up or act in the days leading up to Christ's death, this did not mean it was too late. When we fail, like Peter after his confession of faith, or like last week with James and John asking to be seated in the places of honor, spending our time beating ourselves up for what we have done or have failed to do in the past, or spending our days dreaming about what could be done in the future is relatively unproductive. Not that memories or dreams are bad, but the operative question is, "what can I do today to serve my Lord?"

Joseph did not sulk and feel sorry for past inaction. He stepped up to the plate, and as inconvenient as it was going to be – as much as it was going to make his wife upset that he wouldn't be there for Passover, he answered the question, "what can I do today to serve my Lord?"

"And [he] bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb." Amen.