

John 19: 17-37

John 19: 38-42

At What price

I came across this reflection a number of years ago. It takes on the style of a hand-held camera in a documentary style film. If you can imagine the somewhat jumpy style of camera work, scenes flowing from one to another in a reportage style of this awful, yet so familiar story. It begins in the garden of Gethsemane. So prepare yourself for this whirlwind take on the story that changed the world.

There it was in all its rawness. The untidy rabble – mixture of religious bigots and the clatter of military steel mixed with the blind panic of Jesus followers – The lashing out of one to the ear of a soldier – the horror – the sheer curtain of fear coming down and blinding faith – men running deserting the King of Kings, the rising tide of deceit and anger in the assailants and at the centre- the calm. Jesus healing the ear of the servant – surrendering passively to his assailants knowing that, this is his time.

The time is ripe, this is the moment – the blurred and constantly changing scenes that are characteristic of the structure of the modern motion picture – Jesus before the Sanhedrin = Pilate -Herod - Jesus whipped tortured by soldiers - Pilate uncertain –

Jesus beaten beyond recognition and belief always calm – word in season- knows when and when not to speak – scene after scene rushing forward to the moment, the grand moment that will change and define all of human history –

That dreadful moment – everything has been leading to this – that moment recorded in John 19:13 When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha.

19:14 Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, "Here is your King!"

19:15 They cried out, "Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but the emperor."
19:16 Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So, they took Jesus.

This shattering moment in the life of Pilate would ever define him in history – his wife had warned him, but courage had failed and there Jesus was released to die.

This is Jerusalem Holy city – Passover time, centuries of ritual all pointing towards this day – a day that was signalled by the Prophets and this palm procession celebrated but missed.

Pouring into the Jerusalem gates were all manner of visitors, traders and merchants, the old and the young the cynical and excited donkeys, camels all burdened with merchandise – But struggling against this tide of religion and commerce was the procession of death that was slowly moving against the incoming tide of humanity – battle hardened legionnaires pushing cajoling always brutally moving the procession forward to its destination with death – competing for attention as it pressed its way forward through the mocking jeering weeping crowd struggling against the incoming tide of pilgrims and merchants.

In the midst of it all in a sea of disturbance was the calm suffering servant of God Jesus of Nazareth.

Stumbling – weakened by merciless whippings and surges of pain – Jesus son of God – substituted by Simon of Cyrene –

Fast forward: The agony is paused for a moment as preparations are made for the final and most brutal torture so far. The thieves with him wait in terror as crosses and hammers and spikes are readied. Even the taunting crowd are hushed as they await the horror that was to follow. Gruff soldiers gesticulating, ordering – organising and in the midst of all of this is Jesus. Weakened almost until death – then the brutal ritual begins dragging him then throwing Jesus onto the cross – the crash of steel the tide of voices raising – You save others save yourself the cursing of thieves - the cross is wrenched high sinking into its hole -

no concern now for suffering - the screams of the son of man and the criminals alike piercing the air ignored by apathy. The soldiers turning from the scene busy themselves gambling for Jesus clothes little realising that they are fulfilling ancient prophecies.

The taunting continues - unbelievable calmness of Jesus - making arrangements for his Mother crying for forgiveness – Propheying to the thief and declaring his thirst until after what seems eternal agony, he mutters his last words – It is finished and descends into death.

If the Romans and Jewish leaders thought that this was the end of it – just as John the Baptist had been silenced, so now was Jesus, they were wrong.

Matthew has it in his 27th chapter

51-53 At that moment, the Temple curtain was ripped in two, top to bottom. There was an earthquake, and rocks were split in pieces.

54 The captain of the guard and those with him, when they saw the earthquake and everything else that was happening, were scared to death. They said, “This has to be the Son of God!”

The question here is quite simply at what price?

The son of God reduced to this?

The price for your life has been set at the highest possible level.

Why?

So that we can be free - restored to

God – How will we respond?

There's a story that has been told from Civil War days before America's slaves were freed, about a northerner who went to a slave auction and purchased a young slave girl.

As they walked away from the auction, the man turned to the girl and told her, "You're free." With amazement she responded, "You mean, I'm free to do whatever I want?"

"Yes," he said.

"And to say whatever I want to say?"

"Yes, anything."

"And to be whatever I want to be?"

"Yep."

"And even go wherever I want to go?"

"Yes," he answered with a smile. "You're free to go wherever you'd like."

She looked at him intently and replied, "Then I will go with you."

The price is enormous – the freedom is yours – you are redeemed – Who will you go with?

Jesus is waiting. Will you walk with Him?

Amen.