



Life without Him

And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and went away. And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the grave.

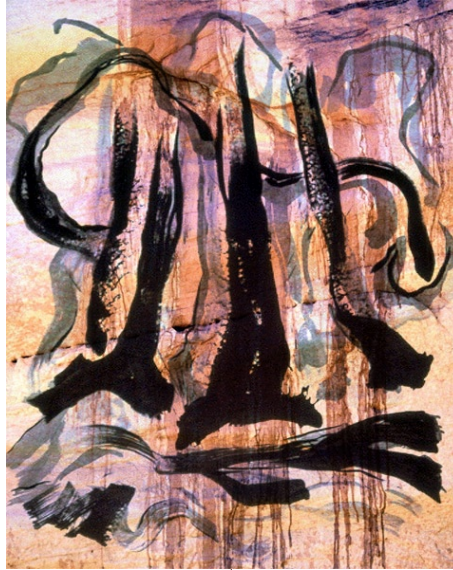
Matthew 27:59-61

If we inherited our bent toward sinning from Adam, then we also inherited our unique relationship with Jesus from those who saw Him and walked with Him during those waning days of His time on earth. Few moments from His life are more intimate, more personal, than those Jesus spent with His friends during His last forty days upon this earth.

We look upon the death and resurrection of Christ as an epochal, historic moment—a turning point in God’s relationship with man. We see it from the hazy distance of two millennia: a moment of great import, yet one that often takes second place to the tyranny of the immediate. We gather together and proclaim the truth of Christ’s atoning death on the cross; we gladly declare it to be both historical and doctrinal truth. We rightly worship a Savior who would sacrifice Himself for fallen man. Our hearts fill with gratitude and praise for one so unselfish and kind—then, come Monday morning, we get back to our “real” lives: back to the factory, the office, the children, housecleaning and laundry.

But at Calvary there were those who lost a close friend. Their “real” lives had been taken up into the life of the one who dripped His blood onto that Jerusalem hillside, and it was a family member, a brother, that was then sealed away inside a cold rocky grave. They all had invested their lives in this Man: who He was and what He represented. Then, suddenly, He was gone.

Jesus said He would be raised, but, based on their behavior, most of His followers probably assigned that notion to one of His mysterious stories or obscure prophecies. He was gone; with their own eyes they had seen Him put away. Jesus said He would walk with them again, but surely no one could walk away from that kind of horrible death. And certainly no one could walk through solid stone.



There have been mornings I awake in a clammy sweat, pushed from my slumber by a dark nightmare in which I am left to live out my days without the companionship of my wife. On those mornings sleep vanishes, and the wrenching emotions leave me feeling sick and disoriented. It takes the entire next day for me to shake the sense of loss, to wash the nauseating aftereffects of the nightmare from my system.

For the friends and family of Jesus, that nightmare was real.

Mary from Magdala was still living her nightmare when she came to the tomb that Sunday morning so long ago. Jesus had been much more to her than a respected teacher, and His loss had brought upon her life a heartsick void that she carried along with her that sad morning. Then, heaped upon that sorrow was the strange disappearance of even the *body* of her Lord.

Life without Him. How would it be to have Jesus suddenly removed from our lives? We have walked alongside Him, heard the tender strength in His voice, accepted the wisdom from His heart. We have felt His strong arms holding us up when others have turned aside, we have felt the rush of His love passing between us. We’ve known His forgiveness, a mercy only He could possess. What would it be like, were all that taken away?

Those who have never married may have grown accustomed to living alone. Even if they would rather be wed, their present lives move to the rhythm of being alone. They have learned, if even unconscious-

ly, to rely upon *themselves* for many things some of their friends receive from their mates. In contrast, those who are married—especially those venerable marrieds—have grown accustomed to the rhythm of depending on someone *outside* themselves.

Having never known union with Christ, unbelievers never mourn His loss, for they literally don't know what they're missing. The church, however, is the Bride of Christ. Every believer has been joined in an intimate, mystical way with the Bridegroom: the Son of God. Were He, somehow, to be taken from our lives, as He was to those who watched Him die at Calvary, it would be to experience one of life's most agonizing pains.



*Jesus, descended from above,
Our loss of Eden to retrieve,
Great God of universal love,
If all the world through Thee may live,
In us a quick'ning spirit be,
And witness Thou hast died for me.*

*Thou loving, all-atoning Lamb—
Thee, by Thy painful agony,
Thy bloody sweat, Thy grief and shame,
Thy cross and passion on the tree,
Thy precious death and life—I pray,
Take all, take all my sins away.*

*O let Thy love my heart constrain—
Thy love, for every sinner free—
That every fallen son of man
May taste the grace that found out me;
That all mankind with me may prove
Thy sov'reign, everlasting love.*

Charles Wesley

Now on the next day, the day after the preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate, and said, "Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I am to rise again.' "Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, otherwise His disciples may come and steal Him away and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go, make it as secure as you know how." And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone.

Matthew 27:62-66