

Palm/Passion Sunday

“As Those Prepared to Die”

I invite you to stand for the reading of the obituary for Jesus of Nazareth:

JESUS of Nazareth died on Nisan 14th in Jerusalem at Golgotha, the place of the skull; a victim of the Roman Empire brutal practice of crucifying common criminals and people who were viewed as a threat to the Empire and political leadership in Jerusalem.

He is preceded in death by Joseph bar Jacob, who raised him as his own son. He is survived by his mother, Mary; brothers James, Joses and Judas; and his sisters.

Jesus of Nazareth was born in Bethlehem of Judea. His family migrated to Egypt when he was two, seeking political asylum from state violence.

They returned to Nazareth in Galilee after the death of Herod the Great. Jesus was apprenticed as a carpenter to Joseph, and worked in the family business until his thirties.

He was baptized in the Jordan River by his cousin, the prophet John bar Zechariah. A self-educated person, he spent the next 3 years living as an itinerant rabbi, with a small school of 12 disciples. He received the patronage of Joanna, the wife of Chuza (Herod's steward), Susanna, Mary Magdalene, and many other women in Jerusalem.

He devoted his life to loving and serving the least, the last and the lost, wherever he found them. He proclaimed that the kingdom of God has drawn near, and bore witness to it through liberating people from the demonic, from disease and from the slow death of social exclusion. For many, he was a guest in their homes, sharing meals together, and learning of God's welcoming and inclusive love, grace and compassion for all.

Despite his family's concern and repeated warnings, his teaching, his work and especially those whom he chose to call friend inevitably drew the attention of the authorities.

The family wishes to make it clear that his arrest and immediate trial took place without due process. The charges of blasphemy and of being a threat to national security were not corroborated by a single witness. He was humiliated and brutalized in custody before his execution by the State.

He died as he lived: extending forgiveness to those responsible for his death.

He will be greatly missed by his family, his friends – the “sinners” – and by the poor.

The family wish to extend their gratitude to Joseph of Arimathea for covering the funeral expenses.

[https://www.seangladding.com/blog-repository/2019/2/15/jesus-of-nazareth-
obituary](https://www.seangladding.com/blog-repository/2019/2/15/jesus-of-nazareth-obituary))

Please be seated.

From the beginning of his ministry, he began to talk about his death. He was very open and honest with his disciples about the subject, even though it confused them. At one point, Simon Peter took Jesus aside, and angrily chastised Jesus, telling he would not let him suffer and die. The subject of death and dying can upset people, even Jesus' disciples.

Jesus didn't just talk about his pending death, he was making preparations for it.

From Mary anointing his feet with Nard which was an anointment used at the time of a person's death, to his entry into Jerusalem, to the meal he shared the night before he died, to the agonizing prayer where he pleads with God to not let him die, to his refusal to run from death, he was preparing for his death. And when the moment came, his final words before he took his last breath were of forgiveness.

In first century Palestine, it was the Jewish custom, to wash the body, bind in it tightly in a special cloth that had been covered in burial spices to cover the smell of death. This was done by the family and friends.

Burials took place within 24 hours because of the heat, which assisted the breakdown of the body.

There was no coffin or casket, though some bodies were placed on a pallet.

Graves were generally hewn out of a rocky hillside, with the body on a pallet, placed in headfirst. Wealthier families sometimes had a cave or catacomb which provided shelves for multiple bodies to be laid. There is some indication from archeologist, that graves for foreigners or the poor, were dug vertically and the body placed in a standing like position.

For others, people like Jesus, who had died on cross, their bodies were often left up on the cross for days, as a warning to the people what might happen to them. When the bodies were removed and unclaimed, they were very often

disposed of outside of the walls of Jerusalem in the garbage dump, which was burning, and smelled. When Jesus references "hell" it is this place he is referring.

A procession to the tomb would involve, much like today, family and friends, though they of course, walked, carrying the body. Most processions had "professional" mourner, who were women, whose role it was to wail loudly.

After a year, families went back to the tomb, and collected the bones of their loved one, placing them in a box called an ossuary. The ossuary might have some form of identification of the person carved onto it, and then it was placed in the back of the tomb, if they had a tomb.

People did not write obituaries, so there is very little recorded history around the deaths of people.

As we know, over the centuries, how we deal with the dying and death, have changed, and are still changing.

People often died at home, where the bodies were prepared for burial, often laid out on a table, and then once properly prepared, laid out in a handmade coffin in the front "Parlor." Homes often had special "coffin" doors or windows, built so that a wooden casket could be carried out following the wake or visitation.

Funeral homes, or as some are now called, "Celebration of Life Centers" were at one time, actual homes with special parlor spaces for wakes and visitations. Most are now more modern facilities, with chapel spaces and even cafes to serve a meal, as fewer funerals and funeral meals take place in churches.

There are fewer casket burials today. Cremations are more in demand. People are also finding creative ways to care for the ashes of their loved ones, and funeral homes have various ways one can care for the ashes of their loved ones.

Then there are all the other details like the legal documents, the finances, the insurance, the funeral expenses, the death certificates, and along with the hundreds of other details we need to tend to around when a death happens.

And then there are the service details - church or funeral home or graveside or favorite bar? Minister or not? Scriptures, hymns, and people who may want to speak? Do you want music? If so, live or recorded? Casket or Cremation? Viewing ahead of time for family and friends? Meal? If yes for the food, for how many?

Burying Jesus was a bit less complicated. So pre-planning for when the day comes when we each will die after a long life or an unexpected illness or tragedy, can be a comfort and help to our families who survive us.

Jesus was thinking ahead to his death and while preparations, different as they were then from ours today, were still being made.

As Larry Rasmussen says, **“Jesus has gone ahead of us on the journey, but not instead of us.”**

Are we prepared for this part of our faith journey?

Amen.