

Column

No story is so full of emotion and sadness as that of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The hymnwriter Isaac Watts captures this pathos when he says: “See from his Head, his Hands, his Feet, Sorrow and Love flow mingled down!”

Beginning on Palm Sunday (the Sunday next before Easter) and continuing through Good Friday, the players in this drama often get highlighted and examined. These include: Judas, the High Priest, members of the Jewish counsel, Pilot, Pilot’s wife and the false witnesses who testified against Jesus.

There is one player who perhaps merits more examination than he often receives. That player is the centurion who stood at the foot of the cross and who after Jesus had drawn his last breath solemnly confessed: “Truly this was the Son of God” (Matthew 27:54).

His words provoke a number of questions. What did he mean by them? How far did his understanding of the ‘Son of God’ go? Following Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, did he come to full Christian faith?

We shall never know the answers to these questions, for the very good reason that the Bible records only this one sentence spoken by this man. What we do know is that Christianity was introduced very early to the little island off the west coast of Europe called Britain, likely by Roman soldiers who had become Christians. Using our imagination: might the one who stood beside the cross at the crucifixion have gone on to announce the victory of the cross in that heathen land?

Regardless, the real question is: What do *I* do with this man’s witness? Do I leave it on the pages of Scripture or do I accept it as true, as further witnessed by the resurrection?

Beyond that, have I made it personal? Can I say the Crucified One is the Lord and Leader of my life? Finally, what can I tell others about Him?

A bishop I knew – now gone to be with the Lord – told of travelling on an airplane. It seems also aboard was a little girl. Recognizing him as a church official, after the plane was in the air and the seatbelt light had gone off, she persuaded her mother to let her go speak to him.

Shyly she made her way to where he was and slipped into the empty seat beside him and began the conversation by saying: “I will tell you what I know about Jesus, if you will tell me what you know about Him.”

I don't know what these two talked about, but likely it included that Jesus was more than a man: He was the Son of God. Using language appropriate for her age, the Bishop may well have gone on to speak of the cross and invited her to trust the One who loved her so much that He hung and suffered there.

The words the centurion spoke from the foot of the cross invite a response. The only one that will do, likewise from the hymnwriter I quoted earlier: “Love so amazing, so divine, Demands my Soul, my Life, my All.”

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who of thy tender love towards mankind, hast sent thy Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, to take upon him our flesh, and to suffer death upon the cross, that all mankind should follow the example of his great humility; Mercifully grant, that we may both follow the example of his patience, and also be made partakers of his resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (The Book of Common Prayer)

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