

Lent Day 40

Saturday March 31, 2018

Reading: John 19:31-42

³² The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. ³³ But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴ Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. ³⁵ The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe.

Reflection

Holy Week is a busy time for Christian pastors; particularly ones who insist on adding more services. As a result, I'm writing this devotion a day late, which means it is Easter Sunday. It's a bit weird writing about the death account of Jesus on the day when we have been celebrating his resurrection. But, John's account put me in mind of the beginning of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (I know, now I'm writing of Christmas about Holy Saturday on Easter Sunday, sorry!). Dickens begins his story thus:

Marley was dead: to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Scrooge signed it: and Scrooge's name was good upon 'Change, for anything he chose to put his hand to. Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail....There is no doubt that Marley was dead. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to relate.

Dickens' purpose and John's purpose are exactly the same. They have each emphasized as emphatically as they can that their character (Dickens) and hero (Jesus) are dead. They have both done so for the reason Dickens writes: so something wonderful may come of the story related. For Dickens it is so the reader can sympathize with Scrooge's horror at being visited by his long dead partner. For John it's so we will believe. But, believe what?

It's Easter Sunday (when I'm writing), on this day we audaciously declare that Jesus has been raised, as the first born, into the new age when death is destroyed and powerless, never to die again. However, for that to have any real meaning, it must be firmly established that Jesus truly died. So, John paints the scene and puts himself into the witness box of the court. I saw this: Jesus already dead, he didn't need his legs broken (which would cause him to drown in his own fluids), and when his side was pierced blood and water flowed out (they had pooled). Trust me, he was dead, you can believe that.

I hope as we've been journeying together with John through lent, something wonderful has come of his story. Jesus was dead, this is beyond dispute and, this being Easter Sunday, I can say he has been raised from the dead. I hope you believe.

Prayer

Lord, who raised Jesus from the dead, thank you for this miracle. You have brought the new life of the new age into the present. Thank you for redeeming and restoring your creation through Jesus Christ. Amen.