

THE ROBE AND THE CROWN OF THORNS



THE GOD WHO BLESSES AND THE GOD WHO SAVES

Scripture:

Psalms 32

The Lord will Protect

7. Lord, You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.
8. I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.
9. Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you.
10. Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD's unfailing love surrounds the person who trusts in God.
11. Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!

Matthew 27

The Scarlet Robe and the Crown of Thorns

26. Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.
27. Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him.
28. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him,
29. and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said.



THE THEOLOGICAL DRAMA OF EASTER

Lent brings to life the theological drama of spring. We find the drama of the seasons of life in the retelling of the story of the passion of Christ. With the rebirth of vegetation, the lengthening of days, the fresh sun on our eager faces, we discover the fresh hope of resurrection at Easter.

This year Easter nearly coincides with the spring solstice, and it is within a few hours of being as early in the season as it can possibly be. The celebration of Easter is based upon the Passover that Jesus celebrated, and the Passover is based upon the

seasons of the sun and earth. It is three weeks earlier than we celebrated it last year.

Since I have been with Church of the Roses, we have celebrated Lent with the Stations of the Cross in an artistic and dramatic series. We have broken a cantata into segments that were presented each week. We have had several kinds of animals for the Palm Sunday parade, and we have decorated our Lenten Cross with fresh flowers on Easter morning after our fifty hour watch, Maundy Thursday communion, and the children's Easter Egg Hunt. These are good traditions for us.

THE SYMBOLS OF THE CROSS (A SERIES)

- This year, I would like to focus our worship upon a series of symbols that have been associated with the cross. The sponge of vinegar, the nails, the anointing spices have important roles in the story of Easter, and today two symbols that are found in the story of Jesus before Pilate. A scarlet robe mocked the claim that Jesus was King of the Jews, and the only crown that Jesus ever wore, which was a crown of thorns.
- On Wednesdays I want to show you some film of the messages of Jesus' life and Holy Week, filmed in the locations where these things happened. Please attend. Please join me for the films that begin Wednesday at 10:30 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. They are very important in the teaching and the meditation that is part of Easter. I cannot show them in the sanctuary because we do not have the equipment, but I want you to see them as much as I want you to participate in our Sunday morning Worship Services. They begin this Wednesday (February 13).
- After Easter, I plan to return to the Holy Land for another ten days of travel, meetings with diplomats and religious leaders.

So, buckle up, here we go again.

THE ROBE

Anyone who wears the robe of authority knows that with it he/she must also wear the prickly crown of thorns. Together they are both the statements of power and statements of vulnerability, suffering and pain.

I was reminded that CEO's wear a crown of thorns, politicians and celebrities wear a crown of thorns, teachers, healers, and clergy also know that leadership travels with both authority, discomfort, and hurt. It's not really a choice.

BULLETIN PICTURE OF THE THORNS

Please look at the cover of your bulletin this morning. Let me tell you about the picture on the cover and where it came from. While I was traveling in the Holy Land a few years ago, I walked along the Via Dolorosa where the Stations of the Cross recreate the events between the trial before Pilate, the crucifixion and the resurrection. The crown of thorns is found at the second Station of the Cross where Jesus was given the crown of thorns as he departed from the Praetorium – that is the military headquarters of the Roman army and governor. Does the second station mark the actual place? Probably not, but it's close enough. It's on the main street, and archaeologists can locate the Praetorium near the Temple Mount, or they can suggest a second location near David's Tower.

I stood in front of an altar inside a Catholic church not far from the Temple Mount. The words "Behold the Man" were still ringing in my head. Pilate said, "Behold the man," and then the soldiers put the robe and the thorns on his back and head. On the front of the altar, there is a replica of the crown of thorns that is about a foot in diameter. "Ah. That must be the symbol we have come here to see." But no; look up; look at the ceiling above you.

Lift your bulletin above your head and look up at it. The symbol of the crown of thorns is embedded in the ceiling in mosaic tiles. Hold this picture at arms length, and look up at it. The ceiling is dark; there are no electrical lights, and there is the soot of candles that have lit this room for centuries. You don't see the circle of thorns at first, until your eyes adjust. Even then you don't see it clearly.

But when I put the picture on my computer and made some adjustments for light, color and contrast, I had a better view of the crown of thorns than when I stood directly beneath it. This crown of thorns is ten feet in diameter, maybe larger. The gold is real gold. And who wears it? It is not Jesus who wears the crown of thorns, but those of us who stand beneath and look up at it. If we are pilgrims following in the steps of Christ, then this crown is ours.

This discovery is fairly dramatic.

PIXNER'S STATEMENT OF FAITH

Bargil Pixner concludes his excellent book on "Jesus in Jerusalem" with an essay that summarizes his own faith. It is like a statement of faith a candidate for ministry might say to boil down lots of experiences and studies into a few words. I'm going to adopt it, and read it to you as words from my own heart as well.

As I read it, think about the Robe and the Thorns that are the symbols today. The Robe is the symbol of power associated with the monarch who rules with authority, and whose role it is to protect and care for his people. Pixner says that part of the story of Holy Scripture is the story of the God who blesses the people.

And the second symbol is the Crown of Thorns worn by the Messiah who saves his people. The Messiah who was wounded by the very people he saved, and who was the victim of the very people whom he lead to God. Jesus wasn't here to hurt anybody. But the Crown of Thorns is the gift often given to people with love in their hearts, by people who just don't understand.

**The Robe and the Crown of Thorns
are powerful symbols.
Perhaps at some time in your life
you have worn both the Robe
and the Crown of Thorns.**

The God Who Blesses and the God Who Saves

By Bargil Pixner

In the story of the creation and that of the Salvation, we encounter the otherworldly infinite being, **God Who Blesses**, on the one hand, and **God Who Saves**, on the other hand. The God who blesses bestows benevolence on his creation; the God who saves intervenes in the development of his creation.

BLESSING

The God who blesses has imparted his laws to all things, to preserve nature and develop it. With the Big Bang, God has imbued everything with the law of growth, so that, through the millions of years, creation has advanced, gradually evolving into the different forms of living beings, up to the highest form, the human being. The God who blesses watches over everything with power of sustenance.

SAVING

However, in the story of Salvation, God also is discovered as Savior, as one who intervenes at certain times in our work, in order to give it a new direction.

The Big Bang itself was a deed of the intervening God. But then God let creation take its evolutionary course according to the laws that God had placed in it. After the creation had reached maturity, and become capable of spirituality, God "breathed" a spirit, a spirit equipped with thought and free will, into the first being of the human race.

Again God intervened when God sent Abraham into the land of Canaan to make him the ancestor of a God-oriented people. He saved his people with an "outstretched arm," brought them forth from Egyptian bondage and led them into the Promised Land.

It was God's decision that God's "Son" took human shape within the Virgin Mary. And when he had offered himself on the cross to expiate mankind, God revealed a new life in the mystery of the Resurrection.

God will intervene once more at the end of time. Nobody knows when this will be, not even the "Son of Man." The God who blesses and sustains can be grasped by human understanding gained through experience; the saving, intervening, miracle-working God can be grasped only through faith.

MIRACLES

Modern time is skeptical of miracles; modern people shrink from the miraculous. But miracles do happen even today. To reject all evidence born by credible witnesses is tantamount to negating the result even before the investigation begins. If miracles are defined as events that cannot happen in reality, then neither could the biblical miracles have happened. If one holds a priori that it is impossible for a dead person to rise again to life, then Jesus never rose from the dead; then all eyewitness reports of the Bible are just illusions.

RATIONALISM

In recent years the scholars of the Jesus Seminar meeting in California have apparently reached this conclusion. They seem to be moving in some ethereal spheres of rationalism. But we here in the Land of the Bible are trying to keep our feet on the ground. We realize that things have happened here that are beyond our human grasp. Only faith has an answer. We are aware, however, that no argument, no matter how plausible and convincing it may be, will persuade a person who is incapable of accepting supernatural facts as real.

FAITH

The one who believes has no need for arguments. He knows the risk of faith. His human intellect and searching mind accompany him up to a certain point, but then a deep abyss opens in front of him; to cross it, human searching is insufficient. The one who dares to leap over the abyss finds himself on the firm ground of faith (Kierkegaard).

We believe, because we choose to believe. We believe, because only by believing will our life have sense and purpose. Supported by our faith, we walk through life with joy and hope.



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