

Behold the wood of the cross!

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. Two names which show up at the end of the story of the passion.

Who were these men? Scripture tells us that Joseph from Arimathea was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one, because of his fear of the Jewish leaders. We are told that after beholding Jesus' suffering and death on the cross, Joseph goes and **PUBLICLY asks for permission to have the body of Jesus taken down from the cross.**

Yes, Joseph of Arimathea, this cowardly follower of Jesus suddenly, through the act of asking to bury the body of Jesus, becomes **BOLD in his witness and love for Jesus. What caused this change?**

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And then there is Nicodemus, whom we first hear about early in the third chapter of John's gospel who came secretly at night to talk with Jesus about how to be reborn in him. Now he comes forth in daylight, and asks for the body of this man who was proclaimed a criminal and publicly crucified. Nicodemus purchases one hundred pounds of spices for burial and buries Jesus in the tomb which everybody knows

he had been preparing for his own burial. What caused such a change?

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These two men, Joseph and Arimathea and Nicodemus, had been attracted to Jesus during his public life. They had seen his miracles, listened to his preaching, experienced his power to attract others. Yet it was not until his passion and death that they had the courage to publicly proclaim their allegiance to him.

Why the cross? Why the passion and death of Jesus? What magnetic force was unleashed in Jesus' passion and death which drew these two fainthearted and fearful men to publicly identify themselves as disciples of Jesus?

The theologian, John Shea, would suggest that it is because this one called Jesus,
who claimed to be God
who was one with the Father
who came so that all the world could be one with him and his father
who could be ministered by angels if he so chose,

this great person called Jesus voluntarily chose to suffer separation and alienation from all creation as he hung upon the cross. On the cross he embraced all human suffering and ultimate tragedy.

The theologian, John Shea, tells the story about a small reflection group he was part of who took time one day to share their personal stories of suffering with each other. He was recording their stories on a board when he suddenly he stopped and realized how united he was with them IN THEIR EXPERIENCES OF SUFFERING.

(Story of being with the young men on Sunday afternoons)

The gospels tell us that Jesus came to bring unity and peace to the world. The four gospels record the remembrances of how Jesus brought us reconciliation and life.

The stories of his miracles or his preaching are simply a preamble to the main event. The final and longest portions of the gospels focus on Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection.

It was

- **by the sea of suffering he entered into,**
- **by his rejection of his religious and civic community and his abandonment of his disciples, and**
- **by his cruel, public crucifixion that he identified with the fullness of human suffering.**

Jesus' suffering and death draws Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus to witness his glory. They publicly come forth and profess to be one with him in that suffering. They now are willing to experience the fullness of life even if it means embracing suffering and death. They fear nothing. They act as faithful and beloved disciples.

(pause)

Today, as we ponder the cross, let the suffering and death of Jesus draw us also into union with him. Jesus promises that if we are united with him who embraced our suffering and death, we shall be one with him in his resurrection.

**BEHOLD THE WOOD OF THE CROSS, ON WHOM HUNG THE
SALVATION OF THE WORLD. COME LET US WORSHIP!**