

THIN PLACES: GARBAGE DUMPS

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Luke 23:1-26,32-49

23 Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus* before Pilate.² They began to accuse him, saying, 'We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king.'³ Then Pilate asked him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' He answered, 'You say so.'⁴ Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, 'I find no basis for an accusation against this man.'⁵ But they were insistent and said, 'He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place.'

6 When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean.⁷ And when he learned that he was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him off to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time.⁸ When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had been wanting to see him for a long time, because he had heard about him and was hoping to see him perform some sign.⁹ He questioned him at some length, but Jesus* gave him no answer.¹⁰ The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him.¹¹ Even Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him;

then he put an elegant robe on him, and sent him back to Pilate.¹² That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies.

13 Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people,¹⁴ and said to them, 'You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him.¹⁵ Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death.¹⁶ I will therefore have him flogged and release him.'

18 Then they all shouted out together, 'Away with this fellow! Release Barabbas for us!'¹⁹ (This was a man who had been put in prison for an insurrection that had taken place in the city, and for murder.)²⁰ Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again;²¹ but they kept shouting, 'Crucify, crucify him!'²² A third time he said to them, 'Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death; I will therefore have him flogged and then release him.'²³ But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified; and their voices prevailed.²⁴ So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted.²⁵ He released the man they asked for, the one who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder, and he handed Jesus over as they wished.

26 As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus.

32 Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him.³³ When they came to the place that is called

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The Skull, they crucified Jesus* there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. [[³⁴Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.’]]* And they cast lots to divide his clothing.³⁵ And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, ‘He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah* of God, his chosen one!’³⁶ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine,³⁷ and saying, ‘If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!’³⁸ There was also an inscription over him, ‘This is the King of the Jews.’

³⁹ One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding* him and saying, ‘Are you not the Messiah?* Save yourself and us!’⁴⁰ But the other rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?’⁴¹ And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.’⁴² Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into* your kingdom.’⁴³ He replied, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.’

⁴⁴ It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land* until three in the afternoon,⁴⁵ while the sun’s light failed;* and the curtain of the temple was torn in two.⁴⁶ Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.’ Having said this, he breathed his last.⁴⁷ When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, ‘Certainly this man was innocent.’*⁴⁸ And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts.⁴⁹ But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

CONTEXT

Golgotha was a city dump outside the walls of Jerusalem. It means “Place of the Skull” as it was a round hill upon which people were crucified by the Romans--to send a political message.

This climactic scene in the gospel weaves together themes of Jesus’ ministry and life, including the (ironic) meaning of his various titles: Messiah, King of the Jews, Chosen One. Jesus’ forgiveness and mercy stand out starkly in a scene of injustice and cruelty.

REFLECT & DISCUSS

Reflect

1. Read the scripture passage carefully and slowly. What word or image stands out to you? Why?
2. Who do you identify with in this story? Why?
3. Go to Golgotha (“place of The Skull”) in your imagination--what’s it like? What do you see, smell, hear? Are you near the crosses or at a distance? What do you feel being there--sadness, fear, revulsion, anger?
4. What and where are our “Golgothas” today, where people are warehoused, forgotten, abused, killed? Hospitals, prisons, inner cities, or behind closed doors in comfortable homes? What does it mean for you (and the church) that God is revealed at Golgotha?

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