

Reflection for Easter Eve Saturday 11th April 2020

Reading: [John 19:38-end](#)

In John's account of the burial of Jesus, he is laid to rest by Joseph of Arimathea and a pharisee, Nicodemus. Both men were wealthy members of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish council. The Romans expected executed criminals to be taken away and buried by their families but the crucified were left to rot as a warning to others. The Jews however would always bury their dead and Jesus needed to be interred before the sabbath the following day (hence the need to break the legs of the two criminals to hasten their deaths – Jesus avoided this because he was already dead). His body is taken down and moved to a nearby tomb.



Time was short so Joseph and Nicodemus were fortunate to find a grave close to the place of execution. Even better, it had not previously been used so no family would feel affronted by the body of a convicted criminal being placed with their loved ones. Jewish tombs were chambers dug into rock, tall enough to stand in, that could accommodate the remains of several people. Access was by a small entrance, about three feet high, that was sealed with a large stone. The substantial amount of spices Nicodemus brought to pack into the burial cloths would

mask the smell of putrefaction. Joseph and Nicodemus probably had slaves to help them; to handle Jesus' body themselves would have rendered them ritually impure and unable to celebrate the Passover the following day.

But where were Jesus' family and followers? In Matthew and Mark's accounts Mary Magdalene and Jesus' mother followed what was happening but John doesn't mention them. To get permission from the Romans to remove Jesus and arrange his interment so swiftly must have taken power and organisation – and courage. It's as if two senior MPs had taken charge of the funeral of a reprobate. Doubtless Jesus' family and disciples will have been grateful and possibly frustrated and guilty that they had been unable to observe the normal customs. They might have felt they had let him down.

So God understands the pain that many people are feeling today as the coronavirus disrupts the pattern of our normal lives.

A prayer for all who feel isolated:

For the sick in hospital who cannot receive visitors,

For anxious relatives unable to visit the dying,

For those whose jobs or businesses seem to have no future,

For single mothers with young children in high-rise flats,

For those who want to help others in the coronavirus crisis but have to remain at home,

For those who have no friends.

Heavenly Father help them to trust you and to know that you are with them always.

Amen.

A hymn: [Now the green blade riseth](#)