

I've heard this story hundreds of times. And every time, I pray for a different ending. I know it all turns out ok, (way better than ok!), but this part of the story is so very hard to bear. Jesus. On the cross. And for what? It boggles my mind.

We all know how the story goes: his long journey to Jerusalem, teaching and healing and loving every step of the way. He's done what he could, he spoke what needed to be heard. He nourished hungry souls and ignited the imaginations of those who had no hope. He turned tables, he changed minds, he breathed new life into those who were dead. He made the leaders fearful, and he transformed the fearful into leaders. That's how the story goes.

But now he's dying. Between two other condemned men. One who sneers at him, and another who worships him. Jesus. On the cross. And for what? It boggles my mind.

Today is the last day of our liturgical year. The day when we recognize Jesus' kingship: that through his life and earthly ministry, he has been revealed to us as both the Son of Man and the Son of God, the King of **all** creation. As Father Stephen explained last week, we've walked alongside the Son of Man as he was carried in Mary's womb, was birthed and laid in a feeding trough, as he was baptized in the River Jordan. He turned water into wine, called his disciples and invited them to follow him. He healed, he taught, he prayed, he cried. He gave all he had because he could. Because he wanted to. And the Son of God winds up here. And for what?

Who do you say I am, he asked. Simon answers, "you are the messiah, the Son of the living God."

As the story goes, Jesus' messiahship is a role of both respect and disdain. The chief priests and scribes try to get Jesus to confess that he is the messiah, the Son of God. A bit later, Herod himself mocks Jesus and puts an elegant robe on him. Enduring the first part of the worst kind of torturous capital punishment of their day, Jesus' hands and feet are nailed to the beams. He is hoisted up on the cross; a hastily written sign hangs above him: *This* is the King of the Jews. Nearby soldiers mock him, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"

It boggles my mind.

On one side was a criminal who sneers at Jesus. "Are you not the messiah? Save yourself and us!" He doesn't believe. He doesn't care. He, too, mocks.

On the other side, another guilty man responds in faith: 'we're reaping what we've sown. He's Jesus. On a cross. And for what? He has done nothing wrong.'

On the crown of a hill known as The Skull, a community of the condemned ~ Jesus hanging in that middle space between one man's faith and another man's unbelief; between one man's devotion, and another man's derision. "Remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Jesus. On the cross. And for what, we ask.

Jesus hangs on that cross for our faith, for our fear, for our doubt, for our joy. Jesus hangs on that cross for our apathy, for our hope, for our disbelief, for a promise to be fulfilled.

Jesus. On the cross. And for whom?

For two guilty criminals, for a band of crooked soldiers, for some insecure power-hungry leaders, for a blood-thirsty crowd. Jesus. On the cross. For his friends, for his followers, for me, for you.

We know this story. And we know where it goes from here. It turns out ok ~ far better than okay! But it still boggles the mind.

Next week, the story begins again. There will be a fresh start, words of hope, promises made. We will be challenged to allow space for this new start, these words of hope, the promises made again as though for the first time. Yes, we know how the story will go, but we will still lean in, listening with our hearts to discern our place in the story, learn how we can live as Jesus lived, discover how we can offer to others that fresh start, that hope, that promise made to each of us ... offering it to those who don't know the transformative power of a Word made flesh, who don't yet know the Alpha and Omega, the messiah, the One who is King of all Creation.

Do we dare boggle their minds as we take up our cross and follow?

As we prayed in our opening collect:

Almighty and everlasting God, whose will it is to restore all things in your well-beloved Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords: Mercifully grant that the peoples of the earth, divided and enslaved by sin, may be freed and brought together under his most gracious rule; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.