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Communion Meditation

What did they think? What did they feel?

By John Free

For those who saw it happen, the death of Jesus on the Cross prompted a variety of thoughts and feelings. I appeal to your imagination. Think some of the thoughts and feel some of the feelings of the people who were there that day.

Thomas figured he might be next. When Jesus decided to go to Bethany to the house-hold of Mary and Martha after Lazarus died, Thomas said, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." The determination of Jesus to go to Jerusalem made little sense to the chronic doubter. Now, Jesus really was dying.

Jesus may have had no better friend than Lazarus. Imagine standing next to Lazarus near the cross with his sisters Martha on one side and Mary on the other. Jesus had called Lazarus from the grave and Mary and Martha's sorrow had found the deepest comfort imaginable. Now the one who restored the life of their brother was dying. And Jesus was not doing anything to stop his death from coming. All of this happened in the space of just a little over a week. Perhaps Lazarus who knew what death was like could offer his sisters some comfort. But the death of his friend must have been very difficult indeed.

Imagine feeling the predicament of Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. They had refused to give their votes to execute Jesus when he was taken before the council by the High Priest. To see this miscarriage of justice occurring was painful indeed, for the venerable Sanhedrin had broken its own rules in its rush to rid Judea of Jesus. These two honest scholars knew what sort of person Jesus was and they had seen what sort of men Annas and Caiaphas proved to be. Perhaps the thought crossed their minds that the wrong High Priest was being nailed to a cross that day.

Pilate and the High Priest also had their thoughts. Pilate had deep misgivings about what he had permitted to take place. His wife had warned him to have nothing to do with Jesus. He could not believe his ears when the mob demanded Barabas be released and Jesus crucified. He had his way, however, with his little sign: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Caiaphas wanted it changed. But Pilate had conceded to the High Priest all he would that day. Sometimes we hate ourselves when we give into others.

John, the beloved disciple, saw the deep pain that filled the heart of the mother of Jesus. She had other children, but this one was so special. Perhaps she thought back to Hannah giving up Samuel, or Abraham offering Isaac. Maybe she recalled Jochabed putting Moses into the Nile. What do you say to a grieving mother who watches helplessly as the authorities execute your first-born?

Imagine looking into the face of Peter. Peter had always had something to say, but today was different. After the crowing of the rooster, Peter's sentiments were expressed with bitter weeping. Jesus had much to say to Peter and Peter to Jesus. Now the words had ceased. As far as we can tell, only deep thoughts and feelings were coursing through the mind and heart of Peter.

This day was especially hard on Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Susanna. Jesus had cast evil spirits out of them. Somewhere in the back of their minds there may have been a dark voice saying, "Now look who is having his way." Jesus could cast out the evil spirits that had plagued these women, but he had not been able to cure the madness that overwhelmed the Jerusalem mob that demanded his death. This was a crazy day in Jerusalem and in the lives of these women whose sanity Jesus had restored. Some things are hard to understand.

Draw near to the centurion. Do not let his suit of battle intimidate you. The centurion was prepared to treat these executions as the others who had been executed previously. Nobody liked executions less than he. But it was part of his job. He did what had to be done, but he knew in his heart that the one in the middle did not deserve to die. When the moment of death came he was ready with the confession that this was truly the Son of God. Can you sense the conviction in his heart?

Let us, by faith, join these people at the Cross and blend the thoughts and feelings of our hearts with theirs. May the bread and the wine cause us to recall not only the events, but the thoughts and feelings of those who knew Jesus.

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