

Reflection for the Fifth Sunday in Lent 2019



The Eldest Son

My father always said that I did more and better work than two grown men could do. It wasn't difficult for me because I suppose that I was a bit of a perfectionist. I liked things done quickly, efficiently, and tidily and, as we weren't well off, I was very useful about our little holding. But I found later that, riches don't make a person good or happy, and on the whole my family was both. We were faithful to the law and we all cared about each other and that was enough.

One day my friends and I heard that the Teacher was coming to a place near to our hamlet and we were keen to go and see what all the fuss was about, and anyway it would mean a chance to get away together and have some fun climbing trees and chasing each other. Our parents were pleased to let us go, obviously hoping that the teacher would have a good affect on their sons, so we set off early before the sun was too hot, but not before my mother called me back and, shaking her head asked "Did you really think I'd let you off without something to eat?" I was delighted and told her so because I could smell her delicious bread and roasted fish carefully wrapped up as only my mother knew how.

Once we were away from our place we didn't do much playing about or climbing because we didn't want to miss anything of the Teacher's visit. When we came near to the place we were horrified to hear the sound of a great crowd there before us.

They were packed tight, sitting on the grass and facing a little hillock where I supposed the Teacher would sit. Of course there didn't seem to be any space at the front of the crowd but young boys can be both determined and good at wriggling and, moving very politely, we were soon in the front row. Strangely nobody seemed to mind and we were soon chatting with the people around us who, like ourselves, were all in a holiday mood. Then suddenly there was dead silence and we saw the Teacher and his friends coming to us.

He greeted us, sat on the ground and began to speak into the dead silence. He didn't teach as the Rabbis did and we could have listened spellbound for ever. He told us stories about our lives and how important they were to our Heavenly Father and how we were to be good

to each other as sisters and brothers and how each of us had wonderful talents and that we must help each other to develop the great gifts which our loving Father had given us, even though we were poor and the world thought we were nothing. I was thrilled and absolutely determined to become the kind of person that the Teacher and our Father thought we could be.



By now it was getting late and I heard his friends asking the Teacher to send us all away because it was getting late and we'd need to find some food. He insisted that they must feed the people and asked how much food there was. It was only then that I remembered my lunch and I pulled at the sleeve of one of the Teacher's friends and offered my food for the Teacher, who must certainly have needed to eat after all the teaching he had done. When the message was given, the Teacher called me to him and took what I offered, smiling gratefully. I muttered that perhaps he would like it because he obviously needed it after all he had done. He flashed me a glorious smile and asked if I was really sure that I wanted to give it to him. Of course I did and I added that my mother would expect it of me.

The rest of the day was like a dream. He blessed and broke the food and gave some to each of his friends to share with the people. The incredible thing is that everyone had plenty eat and there was enough left over for the people to take with them on their way home. My friends who had been hovering shyly nearby were soon called over by the Teacher and we really couldn't believe how lucky and privileged we were. When it was time to go, the Teacher sent his friends to their boat, saying that he would send the crowd away because it was getting late and then he actually thanked us for our company, blessed us and reminded me to thank my mother for the food and compliment her on her bread which reminded him of his mother's baking.

We didn't say much on the way home and ran practically all the way, anxious to tell our families the news. I remember that my mother was radiant at the message for her and that all the parents met and discussed what we had told them. Some remained bemused but I heard on or two fathers whispering, "Perhaps he's the One Who Is To Come." But I knew that that day would always stay with me and I was determined to see the Teacher again.

When we went up to Jerusalem for Passover, practically the whole hamlet travelled together. The big question was whether the Teacher would be there but some people thought it would be too dangerous for him. That seemed very strange to me but my father explained that not everybody looked kindly on a friend of the poor, sinners and outcasts. Well obviously such folk could never have met the Teacher and I put the whole thing to the back of my mind.

It was wonderful as we all approached the magnificent temple, singing praises and rejoicing to be nearing the holiest place on earth. Once inside the gates, the mood changed. The sacrifices could only be paid for with temple money and the money changers were charging incredible amounts for their coins. People were shouting that it was robbery and that their hard-earned money would not be enough for a proper sacrifice. Some women were actually crying when suddenly there was a furious cry "This is my Father's House and you have turned it into a den of thieves!" The tables of the money changers were being turned over and the birds and animals were being freed....and it was the Teacher who was doing it!

Of course the temple police with their weapons drawn were quickly on the spot. But then a very strange thing happened. Practically every person in the courtyard stood around the Teacher and refused to move. There were too many of us to be cleared away and the police, after wrestling with a few people, quietly withdrew. By then the Teacher and his friends had disappeared but the people were now excitedly discussing what had happened and some began to whisper that the Messiah had really come and when, a few days later, the Teacher rode into the city on a donkey, the crowds went wild. We couldn't get anywhere near him but we knew that he was safe because, although the Romans were out in full force, they didn't make any moves and it was just a wonderful day..



How wrong we were! Just a few days later we heard that our own leaders had handed the Teacher over to the Romans! By the time we reached the praetorian the Teacher had been tortured and sentenced to be crucified. He was in front of the governor and so badly beaten that he hardly looked human! The men around us were sick with shock and anger and they said that people had been planted in the crowd to urge the Romans on to do their vile work. Everyone seemed to know that the High Priest and some of the Sanhedrin had hated and feared the Teacher and now they had their revenge. But how could they hand over one of our own to those evil, merciless Romans? Apparently corruption can do anything.

The Teacher had to carry or drag his cross to the place of execution but the crowds were so great that couldn't reach anywhere near him.. I wished that he could know we were there and wouldn't ever forget him but all we could do was keep vigil and ask our Father in heaven to take him from his suffering. Late in the afternoon everything went dark and there was a loud cry and we knew that he was dead, so we began to trudge away, unable to believe what had happened. At the end of the road we saw a group of Pharisees just standing there as though lost. They are rather superior folk who always argued over points of the Law with the Teacher and won't have anything to do with us poor people. But as we

approached, one of them called out to us, "We tried to save him. We told him to go away because they were planning to kill him, but he said he couldn't leave his flock until he had done everything that he could." The man's voice broke and I suddenly saw that they were all in tears. After a moment my father bowed very formally to them and said, "Sirs, you did what you could and God will bless you for it."

Life seemed very hard and joyless after that, but one day we heard rumours that the Teacher had appeared to his friends and they were now spreading his teaching and had quite a following. Of course the authorities tried to stop them and even had them beaten but the friends were not having any of it. They insisted that they had to obey God, rather than men, and apparently one of the most important teachers of the law agreed so they were released and they continued travelling and preaching and teaching and called it The Way.. They didn't, however, come near our hamlet so I didn't see them for years.

But I never forgot the Teacher and when it was time for me to learn a trade, I told my parents that I wanted to go and find one of the groups following The Way. Nobody in the family seemed a bit surprised, so I put things in order and said goodbye. Of course there were tears, but they changed to laughter when my mother gave me a bag full of provisions. "I've packed a bit more than last time," she said. "The friends may not be as good at multiplication as the Teacher!"

Well I soon found a village where they followed the Way, and as I approached a big voice called out, "Have you brought any of your mother's bread? We thought you'd be back because the Teacher said you would be." So that was that! Since then I've travelled all over the country and to other countries too, teaching and preaching and seeing the little groups growing into a huge companionship. Of course there were always some people who wanted to persecute anything that was different from what they knew, but even some of those came to join us and did wonderful work and were persecuted for it. But I'm an old man now and I think the time will soon come when I shall see my beloved Teacher face to face and together we'll tease my mother about her delicious bread!

Sr Barbara

