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A section of the Anglican Journal



FEBRUARY 2023

The Sacred Vulnerability of Ash Wednesday

CONNOR JAY

When I moved from New Brunswick to Ontario to attend divinity school, I didn't expect to find myself walking the halls of a Catholic hospital on Ash Wednesday offering ashes on the forehead for those who wanted them. For most Anglicans, and certainly the Anglo-Catholics among us, the existence of Ash Wednesday is no surprise. I was raised in a rural Presbyterian church, baptized by Baptists, came of age in a Wesleyan church, and educated by a nominally Catholic institution as an undergraduate and by Lutherans as a graduate student. I don't know whether I was never exposed to Ash Wednesday or perhaps I dismissed it and said "not for me" as I am apt to do with many of our beloved rituals. Certainly we observed Lent, but I don't recall Ash Wednesday ever featuring prominently. Somehow, I found myself, like most divinity students do, walking the halls of a hospital in a Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) unit, an oft-required placement for clergy-in-training.

I came to my CPE scared. There are the obvious reasons to be afraid of CPE in a major hospital, not to mention my particular fears. For one, I'm afraid of hospitals, and let's not forget to mention the seemingly insurmountable task of hospital chaplaincy. How do you meet people in their most vulnerable moments, during the worst days, weeks, and years of their lives? And how do you do that, all while you're a student, learning on the job, so-to-speak? I was not just learning how to accompany people through grief, or the particular liturgical preferences

of the hospital and the spiritual care department. I was learning how to claim my space and discover what I could offer, however meekly, that might help someone get through another day. Perhaps a smile, a conversation, a prayer or a poem from my beloved Mary Oliver, or just a listening ear that happened to be available at just the right time. I was learning how to greet come-what-may.

And so, in the midst of a devastating global pandemic, I found myself donning my protective equipment, once again walking the halls of a hospital that had begun to scare me less and less each day. Ash Wednesday, as you might expect, is a big deal in a Catholic hospital. On my best days, I'm not much for liturgies and rituals, which is to say that I'm too impatient to let them begin to work on me. But for this Ash Wednesday, after months of walking hospital halls feeling as though I had nothing to offer, I finally did. Ash Wednesday was not mine to offer, but equipped with ashes and prayers, for those patients who wanted to participate, I could offer something which was already theirs.

There is a power imbalance in all helping professions, but certainly in hospital chaplaincy. Not only is there an imbalance of power due to the caregiver/care recipient relationship, but there's an imbalance due to spiritual authority. Regardless of whether it is real or perceived authority, people have a sense that you have answers to questions, that you have God figured out. There is always an imbalance because you're dealing with people's perceptions and projections on you, of their beloved memories of the par-



Connor Jay was a student in a hospital for Ash Wednesday during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Photo: Contributed by Connor Jay

ish priest of their childhood, the religious and spiritual trauma that caused them to leave faith behind, or the unfamiliarity with faith and distrust of organized religion.

On Ash Wednesday, these differences seemed to fade away, and in all our inequalities we were equal in this: we were scared. We were all feeling vulner-

able, even those having good days, who were nearing a return to good health. Room by room, I meekly offered a prayer I was only somewhat familiar with, and ashes on the forehead that I didn't completely understand. In my vulnerability, as I had tried to meet my patients in

See ASH WEDNESDAY Page 7

St. James Trivia Night Supports ‘412’ Barton Project



DIANA SNEATH

Late last year, St. James Dundas held its first trivia night fundraiser in support of St. Matthew's House '4Twelve' Barton Project, the aim of which is to empower seniors and provide affordable housing. People formed teams to answer multiple choice questions in five categories, all in great fun!

Delicious Avesta Kurdish pizza slices were served and the local Shed Brewery served and sold their craft beers and wines. As well, there were door prizes, a silent auction, and a 50/50 draw.

Several St. Matthew's House staff attended, includ-

ing Executive Director Renee Wetselaar and Chair of the Board David Savage. Renee delivered an excellent presentation about the services and the new housing program at St. Matthew's House. All in attendance were moved by Renee's talk and her caring approach in addressing the needs of all who suffer from homelessness. There were almost 100 attendees, including parishioners and friends of St. James. Trivia night was a fun social evening with opportunity to connect with others in the community.

The event raised \$2,550 for the new housing initiative at St. Matthew's House.



Top: Trivia participants consider their answers—and socialize.
Above: Cheque presentation: From left to right: David Savage (Chair of the Board, St. Matthew's House), Diana Sneath (trivia night coordinator, St. James parishioner), Terese Herron (Rector's Warden, St. James), Canon Leslie Gerlofs, (Rector, St. James), Renee Wetselaar (Executive Director, St. Matthew's House).
Above right: Renee Westelaar speaks to the room about St. Matthew's House and the '412' Barton project.
Right: The trivia contest winner is recognized.

Photos: Contributed by Diana Sneath

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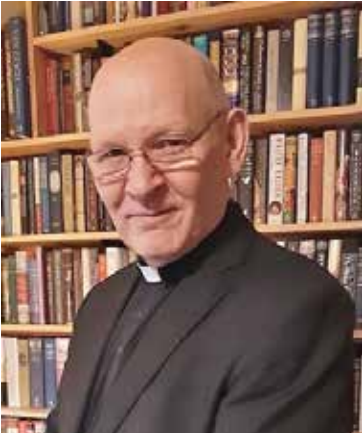
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We Have Some Explaining To Do



THE REVEREND MICHAEL COREN

I spent three weeks in the UK at the end of last year, and during my stay something of statistical explosion occurred—if such a phrase isn't oxymoronic! New figures from The Office for National Statistics (ONS) revealed that less than half of British people now identify as Christian—46.2 per cent (27.5 million) claim to be Christian, a 13.1 per cent decrease from a decade ago. This has led some British church leaders to react with surprise and disappointment, but more level-headed commentators wonder why the decline wasn't even greater.

It's interesting that a census report here in Canada late last year showed something similar,

with the pattern replicated throughout most of Europe and North America. Where there is religious expansion it's often in the growing Hindu and Muslim communities, and humanism and atheism—or sometimes just sheer indifference—are flourishing.

A factor that should give pause to progressives here and across the Atlantic whatever their religious beliefs is that Christian growth in Britain is often within conservative elements, whether they be Catholic, evangelical, or inside the Church of England, and sometimes the greater Anglican Communion. No surprise really, in that certainty sells in times of transition and instability, especially when glued to religious culture. That goes for politics too, which explains the rise of a hard right internationally. Nuance is vital but not always satisfying.

And here's where it all becomes so frustrating. Mainstream churches, based on authentic Gospel principles of love, justice, forgiveness, acceptance, progress, and peace simply aren't always doing a very good job of selling the brand. It's almost as though

we're more concerned with apologies than apologetics. There are many exceptions of course, but anybody who has seen the international church has seen the pattern at work.

"... in that we follow a first-century Jewish rabbi who was terrifyingly revolutionary, and preached a way of life that would change the world, you'd think we could interest younger people who are often profoundly spiritual and searching."

There's some sensibility involved, of course, in that churches often have a lot to answer for, and no denominational record is spotless. Truth cries out to be heard, accompanied by contrition. But in that we follow a first-century Jewish rabbi who was terrifyingly revolutionary, and preached a

way of life that would change the world, you'd think we could interest younger people who are often profoundly spiritual and searching. I write a great deal for the mainstream media and often hear from people, of all ages and backgrounds, who simply hadn't known that Christianity was as I describe it.

A major obstacle is the public face of Christianity that's so often depicted, not entirely unfairly, in the press and on television and radio. We hear of activists when they oppose equal marriage, make homophobic statements, protest against women's reproductive rights, or generally scream "no" instead of singing "yes".

In the US that problem is much deeper, and more representative of the massively influential Christian right. In Britain, and here in Canada, it's far less the case but still an enormous obstacle. The noisiest splashing tends to come from the shallowest end of the pool, even if most of the swimmers are elsewhere. In other words, Christians need to jump in rather than look on.

Yet there are also positives for Christ followers in this latest report. The early church had it right I think, and the organized

faith only lost its way when Rome, empire, and governments took control, and as a consequence a communal and peaceable minority became an aggressive and intolerant majority. Gospel work surely isn't about being part of the establishment or walking hand in hand with the rich and powerful. That's certainly not what Jesus did.

The field is being levelled, and that requires Christians to make their argument anew, which is no bad thing. State church or otherwise, we who try to live by the Gospel should be given no favours, and mustn't assume privileged entry into the public square.

I wouldn't be surprised if that 46.2 per cent wouldn't be even lower if we asked a few more questions, and the figures in Canada are also likely more severe than we think. But that means opportunities rather than despair. If we want people to become Christian, it's up to those already there to get on with it. We have, as they say, some explaining to do. And explaining, delivering the greatest story ever told, should be a joy and not a burden. It's in our hands, where it should be.



Sharing & Caring

Maureen Robinson and Paul Letman from St. John's in Ancaster get set to deliver a generous number of gifts to St. Matthew's House for their Adopt-A-Family program.

Photo: Contributed by Carole Labranche

Song of the Grand Returns!

SUSAN HALL

“THE TEAM BEHIND *SONG OF THE GRAND* HAVE CREATED A TOUCHING AND MEMORABLE MUSICAL STORY WHICH EVERY AUDIENCE CAN RELATE TO. IT WAS A JOY TO WORK WITH SUCH A DEDICATED AND PROFESSIONAL GROUP. I HIGHLY RECOMMEND THIS PRODUCTION TO YOU!”
—Lianne Tan, Music Director, West Plains United Church, Burlington.

Song of the Grand is a story of two friends caught up in the turbulent years of World War II. David and Michael have just married their childhood sweethearts, Joan and Mary. David and Michael join with the Allied forces and find themselves in dangerous situations fighting overseas. David is in the merchant marines and Michael is a pilot with the Royal Canadian Air Force.

The powerful story is told by four performers through narration and song. The narrator is Canon Bob Brownlie; the pianist, Brahm Goldhamer; the soprano, Iris Rodrigues; and the baritone, George Hall.

During this time many small airfields across Canada were



From left to right: The Reverend Canon Robert Brownlie, Iris Rodrigues, Brahm Goldhamer, Susan Hall, and George Hall.

Photos: Contributed

training locations for Canadian, British, and American pilots. Michael trained at one of these airfields, located in the small town of Dunnville, situated along the Grand River at the mouth of Lake Erie.

Song of the Grand has been performed in churches and community halls for 12 years, and many charities have benefitted from the free performance.

All that is required is a small area, usually at the front of the church, and a paying audience. Host churches have often offered refreshments with the entrance ticket price. Some World War II-themed dinners, accompanied by photos and displays of Word War II, have been very memorable.

Song of the Grand's last performance before the pandemic

was in Oakville on November the 12th, 2019. The performers are back in performance mode and are ready to begin again!

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Song of the Grand is a moving experience, wonderful story, beautiful music & singing. It is a great new way to raise funds for your church. - Gillian Wood, St. Andrew's Grimsby.



New Initiatives Spring From Parish Mission Action Plan

Two opportunities for spiritual growth started at St. Andrew's Grimsby

THE REV. DEACON JEAN
RUTTAN-YATES

Like so many other parishes in this diocese, my parish, St. Andrew's, Grimsby has recently held a series of Mission Action Plan (MAP) meetings.

St. Andrew's is a very old church, established in 1794.

These meetings were very well attended by new and longtime members alike. Thoughts were shared, concerns were brought forward, and new ideas were expressed.

For all those gathered there was a deep feeling of gratitude for who we are as a community and what we have to offer to others. Some expressed a longing to deepen our involvement within our greater community, to deepen our own faith, and others wanted to become more involved in our own church community.

One question asked was, "How do we let the greater community know what we have to offer?" We are aware that there are

some areas in which we fall a little short. From these meetings a couple of ideas rose to the top. One was to host a small spirituality group, and the other was to provide an open church from 12:00 noon to 1:00 p.m. through the week. Below are what two of our parishioners have to say about what they experienced through what was initiated since those meetings.

Here is what Melita Frketic, who led a retreat day for our small spirituality group, has to say about our new initiative:

"An opportunity for deeper, intentional faith formation was noticed and sparked a vision to create space and invitation for individuals to gather and to open to divine encounter through contemplative practice in a retreat experience. St. Andrew's hosted the first in a series of four seasonal retreats in early November. The theme of the of the collective gatherings is 'Living in Presence throughout the year'. A group of eight participants gathered in a circle

to pause, rest, and listen, looking to the wisdom available to us within the season of Autumn. Hearts were opened through the sharing of stories, deep listening, and experience of holy presence through breath prayer, meditation, labyrinth walk, and the prayer of examen. The time together was holy and beautiful. We look forward to what will unfold for us as individuals and community in future retreats."

Here is what Angela Bromley, who has organized the Quiet Time teams and schedules, has to say about Quiet Time in the church.

"'Be still and know that I am God.' I will journey with you until the ends of the earth.

A time of quiet is a much-needed concept in today's world. Sitting with God, a time of quiet to reconnect, and find peace. Praying for your neighbours, friends, colleagues, family members, people in need, and the whole world as we see it. Quiet Time at St. Andrew's Anglican Church in Grimsby provides a space to just be. A place to be ourselves, to let go of what is in our hearts, and to help clear the way forward. An environment to guide us where we need to



go and what we need to do, to be our true selves. Helping us understand the way forward and simply to be in the moment to breathe. Breathe in the breath of God. Being one with God, going out into the world sharing love, kindness, joy, peace, patience, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."

We know there is much more we can be doing. We look forward to helping more and getting to know the migrant

workers in our area by working with St. Alban's on Thursday evenings, and with more thought and prayers we will be ready for whatever God calls us to do.



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Thinking and Acting Beyond Themselves

DONNA ELLIS

The youth of St. John's Anglican Church Ancaster take time each Christmas to think of the needs of others. Through several fundraising efforts, chili lunch, and making things to sell at the Christmas Bazaar, they manage to raise enough funds to purchase Christmas gifts for six teenagers who are registered with the St. Matthew's House, Christmas program. Pictured

here is the senior youth group, who go shopping with the lists provided by St. Matthews House and the junior youth group, who stay back at the church and wait for the shoppers to arrive—and then it's all hands on deck wrapping each gift. It is the generosity of the parish family and friends that helps make this possible.

Photo: Donna Ellis



Three Parishes Work Together to Support Local Food Bank

The Reverend Canon Richard Moose hands Jeff Booker, of the Jarvis Caring Cupboard Food Bank, an \$8,000 cheque on behalf of three churches: St. Paul's Jarvis, St. John's Cheapside, and Dunn Parish of Port Maitland. The cheque represents a year-long effort by the three parishes, through a collection of special seasonal envelope donations through the year. The three churches wanted to help families who are finding it difficult to make ends meet.

Photo: Contributed

Reaching Out To Those In Need

BEV GROOMBRIDGE

The winter months are upon us and high inflation and poverty are running rampant, causing more and more families than ever to turn to food banks to help make ends meet. The Church of Our Saviour the Redeemer has an ongoing food drive, but during Advent one of our parishioners, Karolyn Penili, brought the idea of a reverse

Advent Calendar. Parishioners were provided with boxes and each day of Advent were asked to add a food item. The response was amazing. Due to our parishioners' amazing generosity, bringing all of the items to the church in one box proved to be very heavy, so many opted to fill their box and then bring individual bags of food to the parish. We also asked for donations of gently used coats to be

distributed to those in need of warm clothing and there again the response was overwhelming. Jesus said, "For I was hungry and you gave me something to

eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me." In all things we are striving

to follow Jesus' teachings and our parishioners are responding in love and devotion to our Lord.



The Reverend Canon Bahman Kalantari with some of the food destined for St. Matthew's House.

Photo: Contributed by Bev Groombridge

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The Second Mind of Faith

THE VENERABLE MAX WOOLAVER

We often think of faith as something like the tail of a kite: something attached to something else. The 'something else' in this case is a body of statements that are meant to tell us a lot of things about God. And in order to get this body of statements off the ground, we have to believe or 'have faith' in each of those statements. This way of thinking about faith sounds a little dry to me and actually, quite far from the way of faith we read of in the Bible.

As matter of fact, faith as described above is light years away from how I was greeted this morning at our local Canadian Tire store. Our towel rack in the bathroom falls down if you look at it, and today was the designated fix the towel rack day. Hence, I found myself at Canadian Tire.

I should tell you that on that particular day things were not going all well. Christmas, for all its glory—and I mean that sincerely—also brings challenges for clergy. Just a few days before venturing into Canadian Tire, I had visited someone in palliative care in the emergency department of West Lincoln Memorial Hospital. Within

minutes, both she and I were weeping, tightly clasping hands, looking deeply into each other's eyes. We whispered so as not to disturb others in the tense and over-crowded facility. She was whispering of Scotland, whispering of childhood, whispering beautiful devotional prayers she had known since childhood. We whisper-sung: "There was a soldier, a Scottish soldier, he wandered far away."

She whispered: "I am a little afraid... of dying... yet... I know everything will be alright... Jesus is with me."

These moments of Christ's appearing do not leave us easily. And, like Christ's appearing in the Gospels, we can be shaken.

Upon walking into Canadian Tire I was greeted with a smile so warm I wish I could have worn it. This was not the first time I had seen this lady. She turned out to be the store manager. In my previous sightings of her in the store she had been unfailingly gracious. I had never spoken to her before. On this day, I said to her: "You know... you have a glow." The next ten minutes we spent together could save lives. She told me of her love for God, the beauty of God, the need for God's love, the nearness of God's love, the saving mercy of God. I wish,

in this moment of recall, I had the grace to communicate the compelling and sacramental charm of her conversation. She embodied the grace of God.

Faith is not the tail of a kite: something attached to something else.

Faith is not the outcome of a series of propositions.

Faith is the origin of any question you might have of the reality of God

Faith is the origin of any Love which has ever stirred in your heart.

Faith is the Living Being of God calling you into Life.

Faith is the Pain you live for the distress of others.

Faith is the Silence which inhabits the silence of disaster.

Faith is the Promise of Christ to walk with you in darkness.

Faith is the Promise of Christ to walk with you in light.

Faith is the Pre-Existing Forgiveness of your most serious sin.

Faith is Jesus seeing you before you see Him.

We can call this: The Second Mind of Faith. We can call it: 'The Second Mind' because it is a complete 'Mind.' The mind of faith is a complete existence, a complete world, an eternal



grace. Psalm 36:9: "... in your light we see light" We can also call this, after St. Paul: The Mind of Christ.

Faith is not the fruit of assent to a series of propositions but

the encounter of a person. Perhaps an aged woman in palliative care or a profoundly loving manager unequivocally loving every tired customer who comes into the store.



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Ash Wednesday

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

theirs, they now met me. Room by room, the liturgy drew me in, and those haunting words worked on me as they worked on those who received them: "Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

To observe Ash Wednesday is to observe vulnerability, to confront our end, and to submit to our own mortality and failings. To offer a reminder of this mor-

tality in a hospital, where the shadow of death looms starkly, seems at best, pointless, and at worst, adding insult to injury. And yet, having ashes crossed on their forehead was a holy and welcomed thing for most patients. That Ash Wednesday was a release of responsibility, and a welcoming of a new task, one of witnessing. I was never the great healer, and on that

Ash Wednesday I finally gave into that reality, and I was able to give myself to witnessing the Holy coming amongst us, room by room, prayer by prayer, ash by ash, as each one of us was reminded of our origin and in whom our end lies. To observe Ash Wednesday is to stand as a witness, to make one's body a sign pointing beyond one's self.

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Contact the Editor.

Photos – very large, high resolution (300 ppi), action pictures (people doing something).
Include name of photographer.
Written permission of parent/guardian must be obtained if photo includes a child.
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In other words

Who Cares about Barabbas? A Neglected Easter Story



JOHN BOWEN

The four Gospels sometimes tell different stories. Only John's Gospel tells of the raising of Lazarus. Only Luke tells the story of Mary and Martha. Only Matthew has Jesus saying, "Come to me, all you that are weary and heavy laden." There are many such examples.

So when all four Gospels tell the same story, it's worth paying attention, especially if the story is about an apparently insignificant figure—like Barabbas. After all, Barabbas appears only once in the Gospels, when Pilate offers to release a prisoner at Passover, either Jesus or Barabbas. The people choose Barabbas, and we know what happened to Jesus.

Barabbas doesn't appear

earlier, nor do we hear what happened to him subsequently. Did he go back to life as a guerilla fighter? Did he retire in peace to cultivate a little vineyard somewhere? If he had become a disciple, I'm pretty sure we would have been told.

So why is he there—four times? Here's one possible explanation: that the early evangelists found it useful to tell his story in their preaching. What is that story? Maybe it went something like this:

The night before my crucifixion, I didn't sleep much. It had been a trap, of course, and I should have seen it coming. Three of us against two of them seemed reasonable odds, but with half a dozen more of them hiding in the shadows, we had no chance. The result was inevitable: death by crucifixion.

I had seen men die on crosses before and it wasn't a pretty sight. Of course, I could see their point of view. They were the Romans, after all. They thought they ruled the world, and anyone who defied them was dealt with quickly and brutally. And I have to admit, if I caught a Roman soldier—and I had caught a few in my time—I dealt with them quickly and brutally too. In the world of the Jews versus the Romans, it was an eye

for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

But the night before my crucifixion, I wasn't thinking anything as rational as that. The cell was cold and damp and miserable; the rats scurried in the dirty straw around my feet; I tried to pray but God seemed a million miles away.

Finally, a grey light began to grow through the little square opening in the wall high above my head. Morning was near. I tried to collect my thoughts. Was there really no way of escape? Could my friends really not organise some kind of raid on the prison? But no, that was wishful thinking. This time, it was the end.

Eventually, I heard the heavy feet of a patrol coming down the corridor: tramp, tramp, tramp. Then, "Company, halt!" A key turned in the lock, and the door swung open with a loud squeak. There was the biggest Roman centurion I had ever seen, in full dress uniform, with four of his men behind him. "Barabbas! On your feet. It's time to go."

After a life like mine, I'm not easy to scare, but now it was difficult to get to my feet, and it wasn't just the heavy irons on my ankles. A burly soldier took each arm, and they marched me out of the cell and down the corridor. We came to a door I knew

led to the outside. One of the soldiers fiddled with the huge lock on the door, while the centurion unrolled a scroll he was carrying. He read: "Barabbas, by order of His Excellency Pontius Pilate, with the authority of the Emperor Augustus, I declare that this day you shall be ... set free." The door swung open, and I was almost blinded by the sunshine.

I couldn't take it in. Was this some kind of cruel joke? I wouldn't put it past them. "Did you say free?" "I'm afraid I did," said the centurion. "Can't see the point myself. Vermin like you. Now get lost before the governor comes to his senses and changes his mind."

I stumbled into the daylight, and found myself surrounded by friendly hands holding me up. I looked around, and there were a bunch of my men, grinning from ear to ear. "Come on," they said, "we need to get out of here. No point in hanging around. We've got horses. Let's get going." They helped me up onto a horse and we all began to ride towards the city gate.

"What's going on?" I asked. "Never say Rome didn't do anything for you," said Eli with a laugh. "It's the Passover, remember? The governor offered to release a prisoner to the crowd

like he always does, and we got them all to shout for you. A bit taken aback he was, thought we'd ask for that Jesus character from Nazareth. But he couldn't back out just because he didn't like our choice, now, could he?" He slapped me on the back: "So you're free as a bird, me boy!"

Just then, we came through the city gate, and as I looked up, my eyes were drawn by three crosses on a hill. Eli saw me looking. "Sure, one of those had your name on it!" he crowed, "but now this carpenter guy has got your cross." "What did he do?" I couldn't help asking. "Nothing," Eli shrugged, "except get on the wrong side of the priests and Pharisees. Thought he was the messiah, apparently, and that's one thing that gets the priests and the Romans worried. Anyway, why should you worry? He's on the cross and you get to go free. Now is that a good exchange or what?"

Which in a way it was. I was the one who'd done wrong, after all, and by Roman standards I deserved to die. But Jesus hadn't done anything wrong, and here he was dying on my cross, dying my death, in my place. In a strange way, I felt grateful, as if there's something I should be doing for him.



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