

Pen And Cross

BY REV. MARTIN J. CARTER



When the sixth hour came there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you deserted me?"

When some of those who stood by heard this, they said, "Listen, he is calling on Elijah."

Someone ran and soaked a sponge in vinegar and, putting it on a reed, gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait and see if Elijah will come to take him down."

But Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The centurion, who was standing in front of him and had seen how he died, said, "Clearly this man was a son of God" (Mark 15:23-39).

The soldier had been watching Jesus die. The soldier had seen many men die before he watched Jesus die. This soldier had probably even seen men die at his own hand. How is it then that he was able to give testimony to the identity of Jesus? How did he know that "Clearly this man was the Son of God?"

The soldier witnessed noontime become dark. The soldier heard the whispering words of Jesus, "My God, my God, why have you deserted me?"

The soldier experienced the reaction of the crowd, "Wait and see if Elijah will come to take him down."

The soldier witnessed Jesus crying out and breathing his last breath. The soldier probably did not know until later that "the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom."

Except for the noontime becoming dark, what the soldier witnessed was not very exceptional. He may even have had other occasions on which he had witnessed an eclipse of the sun or an eclipse of the moon.

This soldier was responsive to the gift of faith that God was offering to him. Because he was sensitive to the promptings of the Spirit in his own heart and in the experiences of his own life, he could believe that Jesus was the Son of God. He could believe that the man crucified was the Son of God. He could believe that in the face of ultimate defeat he was in the presence of God.

This soldier had been washed in the blood of Jesus. This soldier had been washed in the blood of the Son of God. This soldier said, "YES!" to being washed in the blood of the Lamb.

The recognition of Jesus as the Son of God in the depth of his suffering is our daily struggle. Our culture has a tendency to want to get rid of suffering and pain. Just think of the number of painkillers advertised on television! Aspirin, Tylenol, Advil, Anacin, and others bombard our eyes and ears between acts of our favorite shows.

The fact of the matter is that pain and suffering are part of the human condition. To experience pain and suffering is part of what it means to be human. We are finite beings who by our very nature will experience pain and suffering.

The significance of the death of Jesus is not that we will be spared pain and suffering. The significance of the death of Jesus is that the pain and suffering that comes to us as part of our human condition can have meaning.

It is morbid to look for pain and suffering, but it is human to have pain and suffering. It is mentally unhealthy to wallow in pain and suffering, but it is human to be visited by misfortune, illness, and death. While we work to minimize pain and suffering, we must understand that pain and suffering are part of our human condition.

At noon it became dark. Many times in our own lives we must look inward to the dark center of our beings and know that the Son of God is present to us in our finitude. The Son of God hung on the acacia tree in order that we can bear the pain and suffering, which is part of being human, with dignity and grace.

We have been washed in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, our pain and suffering have meaning. We cannot escape our finitude, but we can make the best of it. We can unite our pain and suffering to the pain and suffering of Jesus and drink from His blood for strength, courage, and dignity in the face of any of life's obstacles.

The humanity of the Son of God means that God has taken on our humanity, our finitude. Jesus hung on the acacia tree to let us know that we count for something. We are precious in His sight. Jesus came to save the finite. The infinite needs no salvation.

Sometimes, when parents lose a small child, they ask, "Why me?" When someone is visited with a terminal illness, they ask, "Why me?" It may seem morose to ask, "Why not me?" but is it? Every day that things go well, we can thank God for the gift of life, the gift of health, the gift of brotherly love, the gift of those who

love us and those whom we love.

Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you deserted me?" Sometimes terrible things have happened to us during our lives, things too painful to handle. Some people have been raped or have been the victims of incest or have been abused by parents or spouses. Some are the perpetrators of such evil against those who depend upon them and love them. People who have had intense personal tragedy in their lives have probably asked God this same question, "My God, my God, why have you deserted me?" The abused spouse, the victim of incest, the child of an alcoholic parent has felt in the dark center of their being deserted by God.

Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you deserted me?" Sometimes fear grips our hearts. Sometimes the fear is caused from the fear of change or the fear of economic disaster or the fear of being alone or the fear of abandonment. Jesus touches us to heal our fears and our anxieties and our depressions. Let us identify the feelings of abandonment of Jesus as He hung on the cross and know he has touched us with belonging, courage, and strength in the face of fear.

God has never deserted anyone. God is the Hound of Heaven, who pursues us through the good times and the bad times and the very, very bad times. God sent the Word to tell us that we are special to God, no matter what we have suffered or are suffering.

Today let us stand at the foot of the cross with the soldier and in faith proclaim, "Clearly this man is the Son of God." Let us place our sufferings at the feet of Jesus. Let us rejoice in our finitude because it is part of what makes us creatures.

Let us come to the Creator just as we are, without one plea, but that the Blood of Jesus was shed for us. We come just as we are to the Lamb of God. Jesus touches our hearts with affection and love, and we are healed, no matter what. We are healed!

Jesus forgives. Jesus heals. Jesus reconciles. Let us give testimony to our faith in Jesus tonight by forgiving one another. Let us give testimony to our faith in Jesus tonight by offering the tender hand of healing to one another. Let us be reconciled at least in our hearts with those who have done us wrong, maybe even very, very wrong.

When we reach out in forgiveness to others, we are healed ourselves. When we reach out to touch others with healing, we are made whole ourselves. When we reach out to reconcile others, we are reconciled in our hearts.

Let us come to the feet of the cross just as we are, without one plea, but that the Blood of Jesus was shed for us. We come as we are to the Lamb of God. Jesus touches our hearts with affection and love, and we are healed, no matter what. We are healed!

I extend an invitation to all readers to write to me at the Office for Black Ministry and Evangelization, 300 Cardinal Gibbons Drive, Raleigh 27604 and share with me your thoughts, feelings and questions about what you read in "Pen and Cross." If you would prefer to call, the telephone number is 821-9729.

Shirley Caesar Releases New Gospel Record

The phenomenal Shirley Caesar, the "First Lady of Gospel," has released a new album titled "Shirley Caesar—Live in Chicago with the Reverend Milton Brunson and the Thompson Community Singers" on Word Records' Rejoice label.

Ms. Caesar has recorded more than 20 albums during her 25-year career including two gold albums, "I'll Go" and "Stranger on the Road," and a gold single, "Don't Drive Your Mother Away." To date she has won five Grammy Awards.

Despite her busy schedule, Ms. Caesar will perform in the Christian musical melodrama, "Resolutions," throughout the Southeast region.

Throughout her extraordinary career, Ms. Caesar has placed service to her fellow man in the forefront. A Durham City Council member, she operates Shirley Caesar Outreach Ministries, Inc., a non-profit organization which also provides food and shelter for the underprivileged. She is also co-pastor of Mt. Calvary Holy Church in Winston-Salem, with her husband, Bishop Ivory Williams.

Ms. Caesar has also won several awards and honors and was the first Gospel singer in history to win a Grammy. Her other honors include: Ebony magazine's award for best female gospel singer, the NAACP Image Achievement Award and an honorary doctorate of philosophy degree in humanities from

Come Let Us Think

BY EVA L. PERRY
GOD'S KIND CARE

God hath not promised
Skies always blue,
Flower-strewn pathways,
All our lives through;
God hath not promised
Sun without rain,
Joy without sorrow,
Peace without pain.

God hath not promised
We shall not know
Toil and temptation,
Trouble and woe;
He hath not told us
We shall not bear
Many a burden,
Many a care.

God hath not promised
Smooth roads and wide,
Swift, easy travel,
Need no guide;
Never a mountain,
Rocky and steep,
Never a river,
Turbid and deep:

But God hath promised
Strength for the day,
Rest for the labor,
Light for the way,
Grace for the trials,
Help from above,
Unfailing sympathy,
Undying love.

—Annie Johnson Flint

Listen, open your Bible and look carefully through the promises of God, and find out exactly what He has vowed to do for you and me. We must know the will of God in order to be wise. The lady who wrote the foregoing poem has really learned something about life.

It is well understood that we shall have tribulations here in this world—but it is so comforting to know that in Jesus we still have peace in the midst of every storm. Those of us who live godly shall suffer persecution—but it will not be greater than what we are able to endure. All of God's promises and provisions are for the good of His dear people. Sure deliverance! Trust Him.

Read your Bible prayerfully and think!

Southeastern University in Charleston, S.C.

She has performed at Radio City Music Hall, Constitution Hall, and the White House and is a member of the Durham City Council. She is an honorary member of the Board of Directors of Shaw Divinity School.



RECEIVING AWARD—The Very Rev. Martin J. Carter, S.A., the 85th founder's event held at the school's new location on the writes a weekly column for The CAROLINIAN, "Pen and Cross," received an award from Shaw Divinity School during James Z. Alexander. (Photo by Sister Marie Faubert)

NC Ushers To Hold 63rd Annual Mid-Year Event

The 63rd annual Mid-Year Session of the Interdenominational Ushers Association of North Carolina, Inc., will be held at the Ushers Home in Franklinton on Sunday, April 10, beginning with Sunday School at 9:30 a.m. The annual sermon will be delivered by Rev. C.A. Perry, pastor, New Jerusalem Church of Christ, which meets in the ushers' building.

Breakfast and lunch will be served by the Orange County Ushers. Plans for the new retirement complex will be discussed. This complex will be named the Austin-Jones Home, in honor of two of the deceased officers who were pioneers in the group's endeavors: Dr. L.E. Austin, presi-

dent for 30 years and editor-publisher of the Carolina Times, Durham, and Ms. Hattie Jones of Chapel Hill, who served for 20 years as president of the First Aid Department.

Clifton Stone of Carrboro is the present president, serving since 1988, and Clyde Moore, Jr., of Durham, is the financial officer.

This organization has membership consisting of ushers from Greensboro, by way of Virginia, Va. to Wilmington on the coast.

ATTEND CHURCH

FAIR HOUSING

Each year the City of Raleigh observes the month of April as Fair Housing Month. The purpose of the Fair Housing Office is to administer the Fair Housing Ordinance No. (1976) 330 for the City of Raleigh.

The Fair Housing Ordinance makes it a violation of the law to discriminate against any person because of their race, color, religion, sex or national origin in the access of renting, buying, selling and purchasing of housing.

If you feel that you have been discriminated against in the above-mentioned areas, ask the Fair Housing Office to check into it. Call Jerry A. Grady at 850-3190.

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What started long ago;
For lessons of our faith reveal
The story of that famous meal
Which even now will still appeal

To all of those who go,
To mark the Hebrew slaves' release,
Or pray for sin and war to cease,
So earthly man can live in peace;

And thus it's apropos
To pass along by word and deed,
Whatever be our chosen creed,
This joyful message we should heed,
For all the world to know.

—Gloria Nowak



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BUT THE FEAST IS THE SAME

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—Virgil

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