

Joseph of Arimathea

There are moments in life when time stands still and nothing seems to make sense. These are often the moments of trauma we endure that cause a seeming rip in the fabric of time and everything stops – the sound is sucked out of the room, people are no longer there in any meaningful way, everything is moving in slow motion – if it's moving at all. These are the moments when figuring out how to function in the aftermath becomes an impossible study in basic needs of the human body.

Breathe in. Breathe out.

One foot in front of the other.

Blink your eyes.

Breathe in. Breathe out.

On the hill called Golgotha, where Jesus was crucified alongside two criminals, I imagine there was a moment like this. I imagine that Jesus cried out his last, gave up his final breath, then all of a sudden, the scene went still. Silent. Just for a moment. Silent and then cacophonous sound as jeers and taunts started back up – but this time, they taunted those who wept as they looked on at the crucified form of the Messiah.

For those followers of Jesus, the moment extended. The voices and jeers and movements of the crowd were dull and removed – ringing in their ears silenced the sound. Blurred images of swirling color was all they could see – save the crystal clear, bloodied form of Jesus the Christ.

This was not how it was supposed to end.

As the disciples realized the danger they could be in they fled the scene.

Breathe in. Breathe out.

One foot in front of the other.

Jesus is dead.

Breathe in. Breathe out.

Run.

Jesus is dead.

But even as many of the disciples fled the scene, there emerged a man called Joseph of Arimathea. This Joseph, “a respected member of the council who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God” – was one of “them” – he could have stayed where he was. He was not known to be a follower of Jesus.

Joseph of Arimathea, went to Pontius Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

Joseph, a secret follower of Jesus (John 19:38), went before Pilate and before his peers from the council of the Sanhedrin who had urged Pilate to crucify Jesus – and Joseph outed himself as a disciple.

Breathe in. Breathe out.

Put one foot in front of the other.

What needs to be done?

We can't just leave him up there.

Tomorrow is the Sabbath.

Breathe in. Breathe out.

Tomorrow is the Sabbath.

Joseph of Arimathea didn't have special insight from God about what was to come. He didn't know if his bold act would result in the loss of his wealth, his status, or even his life. I doubt if Joseph was able to think about anything other than his love and respect for Jesus – in that moment, in that rip in the fabric of time – as the “curtain of the temple was torn in two” -Joseph of Arimathea

breathed in and breathed out.

Put one foot in front of the other.

And chose love over fear.

Chose dignity over disgrace.

Chose Jesus over himself.

After Pilate agreed to give Jesus' body to him, Joseph went and bought a linen shroud. He then went back up the hill and took the body off of the cross. Can you even imagine? The bloody, beaten, lifeless body hanging high above the last remaining members of the crowd. Joseph must have climbed a ladder to reach Jesus. How did he get the nails out of Jesus' hands and feet? Tears and sweat and dust blurred his vision as Joseph tried to get the body of our Lord

off of the implement of torture. Joseph must have clawed with all of his strength at the nails in the cross to get them to release God's Son. All the while, he was careful to catch Jesus' lifeless form so he wouldn't fall to the ground.

Breathe in. Breathe out.

Jesus is dead.

God give him strength.

Mary and the other Mary waited below holding the linen shroud and weeping as they waited for Jesus' body to descend. Joseph finally got the last of the nails out and Jesus' body fell onto his waiting shoulder, in a fireman's carry, as he descended the ladder.

Joseph placed the body on the ground and wiped his brow with his arm, which only smeared blood across his face. Joseph then wiped his hands on his clothing before reaching out for the linen in which he carefully wrapped Jesus' body.

Finally, it was time to bring Jesus to the waiting tomb. I imagine Joseph of Arimathea carrying the body much like another Joseph once carried Jesus when he was a child. Lovingly, gently, respectfully cradling Jesus in his arms as a final act of love on that impossibly dark day.

As he lay Jesus in the empty, cave-like tomb I wonder how long he stayed before rolling the rock in front of the entrance and walking away. I wonder what he said to Jesus in the quiet moments in the darkness after such a loud, horrific, chaotic day.

Covered in blood, sweat, dirt, and agony – Joseph of Arimathea had publicly bound his allegiance to the Son of Man. Unlike the twelve, this was likely the first time Joseph was able to be alone with Jesus – how he must have wept knowing the answers he so desperately desired would not come. How he must have wept on a day that started with him standing alongside those pressuring Pilate to convict Jesus and ended with him cradling the deceased form of the “King of the Jews” and walking alone to place his body in a tomb.

Breath in. Breathe out.

Jesus is dead.

Put one foot in front of the other.

Breathe in. Breathe out.

Push the stone with all of your might.

Jesus is dead.