

Lent: Joining Jesus on Death Row

During the season of Lent we wait with Jesus as he awaits execution. Our waiting, however, is not a passive waiting—just being there as detached observers. No, it's an active, intense, strenuous waiting with Jesus. If we can use modern imagery, we join Jesus on death row and it's as if **we** are waiting for our own execution, as well as for his. And, indeed, we are!

I've read and observed (in limited ways) that when a person is about to die, life comes into clearer focus. Ironically, at the end we seem to get the right perspective on the whole of life. Suddenly, or gradually if time permits, the truly important things appears as such—truly important, and everything else fades into the background. On the border between this world and the next, few talk about the weather.

As we wait with Jesus on death row, anticipating his death on Good Friday and a new kind of life after Easter Sunday, Jesus focuses on the things that matter forever. Let's listen in on his conversations with his disciples.

If you listen, I think you can identify what could be called core-values of Jesus' kingdom. These are treasured realities that give heart and soul to living, that call for the deepest levels of commitment, and that are worth dying for if occasion demands. Let me list a few of them.

At the very heart of kingdom value we find the unbelievable love of God. It's the broken heart of the prodigal's father who grieves his son's loss and it's the glad heart of the father when his son returns home. It's the love that can't stop, despite the crude and rude disrespect of the prodigal. And it's the love that can't tolerate anyone—not even a more righteous older son—throwing a damper on the wild celebration after reclaiming the cherished missing. It's the same love that reaches out to us and others with such incredible patience, but that still will not tolerate our refusals to party when people come home. Loving people, finding them at all cost, celebrating their return—these are central values for the One who waits on death row.

Obedying God is another value. Jesus went to death row because his mission from God demanded it. On several occasions (especially in Luke's gospel), Jesus says he **must** go to Jerusalem. Some have called this the "divine must." It was God's will. Jesus was God's servant and he would do his Father's will even if it cost him everything, even if it lands him on death row. Finding out what God wants and doing it—these also are central values for the One who waits on death row.

A third value could be put this way: nothing can interfere with the first two core values, absolutely nothing. Loving people and obeying God the way Jesus did take priority over everything else in life. For Jesus, all comfort and convenience, all aims and ambitions, all the good things of life—**all** take a back seat to love of people and obedience to the will of

God. If occasion demanded, everything could be and should be sacrificed for these. And, of course, we know that, in the end, the One who waits on death row sacrificed everything.

The third core value has a corollary: the worth and value of everything in life can be determined by how well it serves the core values of loving people and obeying God. All aspects of our lives, individually and corporately as a church, must answer to these priorities—we reject what doesn't help us love and obey, and we embrace what does. Certainly, it takes time to ask this question of all the activities, commitments and opportunities of our lives. But, then, as we wait with Jesus, that is what we have, "time."