

## Crossroad 8—Dead End?

## Good Friday

**Mark 15:37,39** With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last... And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"

What's the longest trip you've ever driven? Growing up on a farm in southeastern Wisconsin, my family rarely took long trips. Vacations were usually quick getaways to the Wisconsin Dells, to Green Bay, or to see relatives in Minnesota or Michigan. But my third grade year we made "elaborate" plans to head west to Colorado. When you plan to sit in a car that long, traveling past cornfield after cornfield and seeing population signs that say "9," you better hope that the place you're going to is worth it. You don't want to drive for nothing. And it was worth it. The majestic mountains were breathtaking. It was the best family vacation.

For the past six weeks we've been traveling down crossroads that our Savior took the last week of his life. In reality, the week we've traveled with him was only a short jaunt of his journey. He had been traveling these roads to the cross from the time he was in the cradle. In our lesson today, he reaches his destination. Is the trip worth it? To be sure, it's a breathtaking scene, but a different kind of breathtaking. Our lesson says, *"With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last."*

At first, this scene seems like a wasted trip. You mean to say that Jesus did everything he did—taking on human flesh and setting aside full use of his glory—so he could hang on a piece of wood? That seems as useless as traveling cross-country on an interstate highway that winds up being a dead end. But while this Good Friday may at first glance appear to be a dead end, we soon see it was not. It wasn't a dead end for a Roman centurion who traveled with Jesus on the crossroad to Golgotha. And it was not a dead end for us, as we continue our travels with Jesus on another crossroad.

### I. Dead End? Not for the Centurion

For all intents and purposes, this had the makings of a typical day for the Roman centurion. As a captain of the Roman army, he had often heard and executed the command, "Crucify these men!" He expected that by the end of the day, whomever was entrusted to his care would be dead. He expected a dead end as he escorted Jesus to the place of the skull. And it didn't phase him one bit. While our stomachs would feel squeamish to carry out such a command, repetition led this man to carry it out without a second thought. While we would feel sorry for the criminal who shrieked in pain as we drove nails through his hands, you wouldn't expect a word or feeling of pity from this brute. If he fit the description of the day, his emotions were nonexistent. He was a stone. A rock.

And not only would that description apply to his emotions, more than likely it applied to his faith as well. The Romans, by in large, at this time did not know about the living God. Their worship centered around mythological figures, such as Mars, the god of war, or Jupiter, the god of the sky. In addition to the numerous gods and goddesses of mythology, the Romans regarded their emperors as gods. Caesar would have been this soldier's god. With a faith resting on mythological creatures or human leaders, this centurion's faith was dead.

But something happened to this emotionally and spiritually dead soldier on this particular Friday. There was something different about the prisoner he was guarding. And it wasn't just one thing. If this centurion had been assigned to watch over Jesus from the time he was handed over by the Jews, this centurion would have heard Jesus explaining to Pilate how his kingdom was not of this world. He would have seen Pilate struggle to convince the people to let this man go

because he couldn't find any guilt in him. He would have heard the sermon Jesus preached to a group of women on the way to Golgotha, saying they shouldn't weep for him. The centurion would have heard Jesus pray on his behalf, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Under an inexplicable dark sky in the middle of the day, the centurion heard Jesus scream in agony, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He heard Jesus victoriously proclaim, "It is finished!" And then, the centurion witnessed something that perhaps impressed him most: He saw Jesus die in such a way that he did not lose his life but surrendered it by his own will. With the words, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit," Jesus showed he was not escorted to the dead end, rather, he went on his own accord.

It's then, after all these miraculous signs and wonders, that the Holy Spirit records another miracle for us in his Word. On this Good Friday, we witness the miracle of faith as the Holy Spirit sprouted life in a stone-dead heart. Our lesson says, "*When the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, 'Surely this man was the Son of God!'*" What seemed like a dead end was the beginning of life. This crossroad was not a dead end for the centurion. But what about for us?

## II. Dead End? Not for Us

As we stand here today in front of Jesus, hearing his cries and seeing how he died, it has all the appearances of a dead end. It's the one time of year that the altar cloths are black. The hymns are in minor keys. The mood is somber. The silence you hear on the way out will be deafening. You have come here today for a funeral. You have come here today to mourn the death of Jesus.

But there's something about this funeral that makes it more mournful than others. As we sit in our pews, we cannot escape the thought that we had a hand in this funeral. We cannot escape the anguish that our sins pinned Jesus to the cross. We can't escape the reality that those nails should have been driven through our hands. The blood staining the ground should have been our blood. We should have been the ones suffering the torments of hell and crying out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken *me*?" We should have been the ones with parched mouths, begging, "I thirst." We should have been the ones absorbing the insults of onlookers. We should have been the ones who breathed our last and died. Because of our sin, this should be our funeral. The Bible says, "*As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins*" (Eph 2:1). This should be our dead end. But it's not.

Why? Because this was not a dead end for Jesus. Oh, it's true, Jesus really died. As he breathed his last, Jesus, the Son of God, **died**. As the hymnwriter says, "Oh, sorrow dread! God's Son is **dead**" (CW 137:2). It wasn't a hoax. Jesus didn't fake his death. As we travel this crossroad, we don't have "Dead end?" because we're questioning the word *dead*. It's the word *end* that we have an issue with. This Jesus, who was dead on the cross, didn't stay dead. This was not the end. That's why today is not just Friday, it's Good Friday. Good Friday because of what would happen on Easter Sunday. The dead Jesus, whom you came to mourn today, would be alive. And not only would he be alive, he *is* alive.

And because of that, this crossroad scene we gaze at with the centurion is not a dead end for us. Rather, it's the beginning of life, our life with Jesus. Listen to what the inspired writer has to say about how Jesus' death brings life to you and me: "*Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. . . . Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we*

*will also live with him. . . . Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Ro 6:3,4,8,11).*

Indeed, brothers and sisters, the only thing that came to a dead end at Calvary was death itself. For Jesus there would be life. As a result, for the centurion, for us, and for anyone else who looks to him in faith, there is life also. Amen.