



## In the Dark Times

**T**here are times when everything looks bleak and it's sort of like looking through dark glasses. It passes, but while I'm there, the "dark clouds" in my sky seem to be a very present reality. Sometimes there is a reason and sometimes not. It's just dark and I don't know what to do about it. Frankly, prayer, reading the Bible and doing religious stuff don't help much. It's just dark.

I'm in good company. The prophet Isaiah said that the coming Messiah would be "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3). I've been thinking about Jesus' tears over Jerusalem (Luke 19) and at Lazarus' death (John 11), and his anger and grief in Mark 3.

There is great human pathos in the question Jesus asked his disciples when so many were leaving: "Are you leaving, too?" And the cross is, of course, the greatest example of dark places.

This morning I was reading Luke 22:39-46 and the parallel passage in Mark 14:32-41 referring to Jesus' agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. You'll remember that Jesus went off by himself to pray.

He told his disciples, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch." The disciples didn't watch. They just went to sleep.

Luke wrote, "And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood to the ground" (Luke 22:44). As I read that, a question came to mind. When Jesus was in agony and his sweat became like drops of blood, how did the disciples know it? They were asleep. Where did Luke and Mark get that part of the story? Who told them?

Jesus told them. I suspect there were a number of reasons he told them. One of those reasons was to remind them that being human isn't fun sometimes. Jesus was saying that dark times are a "normal" experience for believers...not a sign of unbelief, sin or apostasy. As I read that, I felt better about my own periods of darkness.

There are a lot of things unique about the Christian faith, but maybe at the top of that list is Christ's identification with everything human. "For we do not have a high priest who

is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are..." (Hebrews 4:15).

Several summers ago we went with our grandchildren and their parents to Boston. Anna and I served in New England for years and we wanted to share something of the American heritage with them.

We walked the Freedom Trail. We visited Old Church and the homes of the famous (and dead) who have made America what it is.

We went to the birthplaces of two American presidents—John Adams and John Quincy Adams—just a block from the church we served. We visited Plymouth, Gloucester and Salem.

Everyone had a wonderful time...except for me. I don't do tourist stuff well. There are just so many dead people's houses I can take. When we were at the Granary Burying Ground it was a humid 97 degrees and we had already walked a thousand miles.

Anna told our granddaughters she would give five dollars to the first one to find five graves—those of Samuel Adams, Paul Revere, Mother Goose (yes she's buried there too) and two others. They promptly scattered into the burial ground and found all five.

Do you know what I did? That entire time I sat on the ground and sulked. I didn't say anything, but I found myself envious of the dead folks in the cemetery. When we left, I was not a "happy, joyous Christian" and, having a pity party, I walked behind everyone else.

Do you know what happened? Courtney, my youngest granddaughter fell back and slipped her hand into mine. "Hi, Pops!" she said grinning. "If it's alright with you, I'm going to walk with you awhile."

That's when everything changed! I wasn't so fed up anymore with dead, white males and historic monuments. In fact, a little later, when we all got ice cream, I sat there and thought, *It doesn't get any better than this.*

Sometimes when I go through dark times and complain to Jesus, I think I hear him say, "It does get dark, doesn't it? If it's alright with you, I'm going to walk with you awhile." □