

Monologue – Joseph of Arimathea

I wouldn't want to draw too many comparisons – but I do share a few things in common with Jesus: for starters, we both hail from small, insignificant towns in the north. Would you know of Arimathea if it wasn't mentioned with my name in the Bible?

Both our fathers were in business. And, like me, Jesus was groomed from a young age, learned the family trade, matured into management and inherited the brand name.

But you probably don't know Jesus as a carpenter, do you?

Well, I too, was involved in religious affairs, like the Nazarene, albeit in very different circles. My respected position in the Sanhedrin, together with my business interests, tied me closely to the religious elite, the chamber of commerce and the political establishment of Jerusalem. It made good business sense to be well connected.

Jesus, of course, had his connections too: from rich young rulers to peasant women; from Roman centurions to Jewish Sadducees; from shepherds to magi; from lepers to federal tax bureau representatives. I never quite understood how he could balance such diversity.

But then I, too, tried to bridge my business role with my political ambitions; tried to square religion with commerce.

Business was good those days. Profitable. I was certainly a man of means and could occasionally escape to the cottage on the Galilee. I know Jesus, on the other hand, didn't always have a place to lay his head.

So there *were* differences even with our similarities. And our differences, I suppose, kept us apart. Frankly, at the time, I didn't see any profit in listening to a renegade preacher.

But then, somewhat mysteriously, I met him.

It wasn't long before his death, but meeting him changed everything.

He could speak my language – whether we argued about theology or politics or the currency markets. But more than that, he spoke to my heart, my soul. Yes, even business people have a conscience!

When he died I felt compelled to do things I'd never before imagined ... and it was like two worlds were merging.

In a way I surprised myself when I asked Pilate for permission to bury the body. We all know that a business is only as good as its reputation. Having a religious traitor and political insurrectionist buried on your property wasn't exactly the reputation most people sought. I knew it would mean some negative headlines in the morning paper.

I had also learned early in my career that you didn't approach Pilate for just anything. The man was unpredictable and barbaric. But now knowing Jesus, I felt compelled to sign the waiver forms and risk the liability of accepting the body from the cross – even forgoing an undisclosed amount of money – regardless of consequences.

And I knew there would be consequences. This burial, for one, would not sit well with my associates in the Sanhedrin who had sanctioned his death. For the record, by the way, I did not support his execution – and I'm proud to have stood in opposition together with my esteemed colleague, Nicodemus. But it's one thing to speak behind closed doors; it's something else to act publicly.

Was it because I had come to know Jesus that I could now sacrifice a few personal possessions? I mean, we had obviously purchased the tomb for other reasons. My wife and I had actually just settled on the location – a perfect spot amidst a grove of trees in the garden. I had also purchased the oils and perfumes and his linen shroud. No tax benefit, no business write-off, just a cash donation. Not much, I admit, for someone of my net worth, but something I could do.

And I've often reflected since on what prompted me to sit with the women at the burial. This wasn't company I ever kept before. They weren't shareholders, board members or executives. I stood out, given I was one of a few men present. And everyone knew *my* name, of course, from public office and from the street sign above my store, but I didn't know theirs. Laws and cultural practice separated the rich from the poor. But somehow Jesus' death changed all that. And I gave the expensive spices to them.

That was some years ago.

I'm still in business today. Can't seem to retire. And although my association with the Sanhedrin has changed, I remain a CEO of a profitable enterprise.

But the worlds are not as distinct anymore. Somehow Easter changed all that. Is it presumptuous to say that I see glimpses of the resurrection while I'm at work? How else would one describe forgiveness in the boardroom, non-discrimination practices, efforts that hold

up the dignity of the employee, models of coaching and empowerment, and processes of consensus that reflect the church – well, in the workplace – outside the church walls?

That's not all I see, to be sure. But I've had to ask myself: what must a rich person do? What's my role in the kingdom? Perhaps if we can ponder how church and business might join in ministry, the resurrection may again surprise us.

Given the circumstances, I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to serve Jesus at his death – in ways I could offer. My hope today is that we'll all be about the business of the resurrection – serving Jesus, our living Lord.

Hymns of Response:

#39 STS - *"Will you come and follow me"*

#383 HWB – *"God, whose giving"*

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