

The Cross and the Resurrection

From the Theology of Work Bible Commentary on Mark

The topics of status and grace return to the fore as Jesus faces his trial and crucifixion. “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Even for Jesus the path of service requires renouncing all status:

“The Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again.” (Mark 10:33–34)

The people — correctly — proclaim Jesus as Messiah and King. But he sets aside this status and submits to false accusations by the Jewish council, an inept trial by the Roman government, and death at the hands of the humanity he came to save. His own disciples betray, deny, and desert him, except for a number of the women who had supported his work all along. He takes the absolute lowest place, forsaken by God and men and women, in order to grant us eternal life. At the bitter end, he feels abandoned by God himself. Mark, alone among the Gospels, records him crying the words of Psalm 22:1, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” On the cross, Jesus’ final work is to absorb all of the world’s forsakenness. Perhaps being misunderstood, mocked, and deserted was as hard on him, as was being put to death. He was aware that his death would be overcome in a few days, yet the misunderstanding, mockery, and desertion continue to this day.

Many people today also feel abandoned by friends, family, society, even God. The sense of abandonment at work can feel very strong. We can be marginalized by co-workers, crushed by labor and danger, anxious about our performance, frightened by the prospect of layoffs, and made desperate by inadequate pay and meagre benefits, as was so memorably described in Studs Terkel’s book, *Working*. The words of Sharon Atkins, a receptionist in Terkel’s book, speak for many people. “I’d cry in the morning. I didn’t want to get up. I’d dread Fridays because Monday was always looming over me. Another five days ahead of me. There never seemed to be any end to it. Why am I doing this?”

But God’s grace overcomes even the most crushing blows of work and life for those who will accept it. God’s grace touches people from the immediate moment of Jesus’ submission, when the centurion recognizes, “Truly this man was God’s Son!” (Mark 15:39). Grace triumphs over death itself when Jesus is restored to life. The women receive word from God that “he has been raised” (Mark 16:6). The ending of the gospel is abrupt. This is not a pretty story for religious pageants but God’s gut-wrenching intervention in the grit and

grime of our ragged lives and work. The busted tomb of the crucified criminal is more proof than most of us can stand that “many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.” Yet this amazing grace is the one way our work can yield “a hundredfold now in this age,” and our lives lead into “the age to come, eternal life.”