

Walking the Walk

Anyone who's ever had the privilege of accompanying someone on the final days of life knows what an agonizing, heart-wrenching, but grace-filled time it can be. I had that experience more than 16 years ago as I walked with my husband as he died.

As he weakened, I held him. As he was afraid, I listened. As he said his goodbyes to family and friends, I was there. As he and I let go of plans for our future together, we grieved. As he came to peace, knowing he would not choose, but would accept what was happening, we both came to peace, supported by the prayers of each of our faith communities. He knew he was going home to God and even said he found himself "coming and going" from earth to heaven. "God's calling," he said. "He's getting insistent." As his favorite hymn said, even in that time of pain, "It is well with my soul."

As I think back on that time, I find myself imagining what it might have been like for Mary to be with Jesus in those days before he died.

Imagine seeing your beloved son in whom you had seen such promise misunderstood bound and on trial and you could do nothing to stop it. Why didn't he listen, tone things down, not upset the establishment? Why didn't he hang with a better crowd? Why didn't he listen? Why? Why? Why? Maybe he was listening, but to another voice, not mine. Maybe this was what that angel meant so long ago, or the prophetess in the temple. Couldn't there be another way?

And then suddenly I see him bloody with a crown of thorns on his head and carrying that heavy wooden cross. I want to go to him, tend his

wounds, assure him everything would be all right, but the crowd pushes me out of the way.

And he falls, not once, but three times, each time weaker and more bruised. Even getting forced help to carry the cross from a reluctant bystander doesn't seem to make it any easier for him. That's my child. My heart is breaking. I push in to get

nearer to him and our eyes lock. In that moment we are one sharing the pain. "I'll be Ok, Mom," he assures me, but I can only see the beautiful infant I cradled in my arms, the adventurous boy I bandaged up, the strong man I was so proud of, and I wished I could patch him up, take him home, and assure him all would be well. I feel powerless and alone. I

want all of this to stop and things to get back to the way we had planned. Letting go of what might have been is almost too much to bear.

Things become a blur, but I keep following. I'm standing by the foot of that cross. I can't control the tears. I hear him shout out, "God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" That's my cry, too. This just can't be happening. Surely God would not let this happen. But it is. And they are laying his broken, bloody body in my arms. And I weep uncontrollably. How will I ever be OK again as he promised? The heavy rock closes the grave and I go home. But to what?

If the story ended there, there would be no hope, no point to Jesus' life. But it doesn't end there. The sun returns again, there is new life and promise. Jesus rises from the grave. And "it is well with my soul.

—Angela Anno, Pastoral Associate

