

Reflection



- Showing love
- Giving hope
- Bringing peace

The Church of St John & St Leonard

Matthew 28:11-15

Wednesday 15th April 2020

¹¹ While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. ¹² When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, ¹³ telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' ¹⁴ If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." ¹⁵ So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

I must confess that when I recall the Easter story and those we meet in it, the guards are never usually top of my list! It could be because it is only in Matthew's gospel that we meet them. So why did Matthew choose to include them? As you know, Matthew's gospel is written with a Jewish audience in mind. The story of the disciples robbing the grave was still prevalent in Jewish circles at the time Matthew was writing and it is likely that Matthew chose to include the story of the guards to set the record straight.

So who were the guards and what do we know about their role? Earlier in Matthew's gospel (chapter 27 verses 62-66) we read that the Chief priests and Pharisees had remembered the promise Jesus made that after three days he would rise again; and they went to Pilate asking for a guard to be put on the tomb so that the disciples would not steal the body and claim that Jesus had risen from the dead. Pilate agreed to their request and so we read that the tomb was sealed as well as they knew how, the stone was rolled across and guards posted.

The guards would have been well trained and were employed for their ability to keep anyone unwanted out. The disciples would have been no match for these professionals but an angel on the other hand, that was a different story. One commentator describes how the guards would have had to stand there, no more than passive spectators, as they watched God at work. I wonder when the last time was that you saw God at work either in a small way or in something bigger? I wonder how you felt and how you responded?

As our passage begins, we see the guards having to give an account to the Chief Priests about what had happened. Interestingly, the Chief Priests and elders do not at any stage disbelieve the account the guards bring to them; but instead they pay the guards off, insisting that they circulate a false story about the disciples stealing the body while the guards were asleep. I imagine for the guards, while they would have taken a reputational hit, they are probably grateful that they were leaving alive. I also

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wonder what impact watching God at work had on the guards both in the short and long term.

So the guards exit the scene and we are left with the Chief Priests and Elders. They begin the Easter story smug and feeling like they hold all of the cards, but now we see them in disarray devising a plan and a cover story in secret. I wonder what impact the truth of God at work had on them as the guards gave their account. Did they stop and question whether they had done the right thing or was their fear and desire for power too overwhelming for them to give the truth of the resurrection a real chance?

Despite the best efforts of many in the Easter story, the incredible, miraculous work of God cannot be stopped. Because Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, hallelujah! I would encourage you to look for ways you can see God working, even in these difficult times and phone a friend to encourage them too as we journey together through this unsettling time knowing that nothing can stop the power and work of God.

The Revd Vicki Bryson

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