



The death of Jesus

Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, 'I am thirsty.' A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished.' With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (John 19:28-30 NIV)

Service?

Zero stars for that service! Krish Kandiah called it 'an insult: a sponge full of bitterness raised on a stick of irony'.ⁱ

To be fair, it might also have been considered an act of mercy because the wine vinegar had an anaesthetic element to help dull the pain. It was only a small gesture that would not have been much more than sticking a little plaster on a broken arm but perhaps it was better than no offer at all?

Elsewhere Jesus had made numerous calls to service, saying that those who brought something as small as a cup of water to a child is providing a service borne out of love and generosity. (see Matt 10:40-42)

And, when Jesus met a Samaritan woman at a well (a hole dug down get to the water underground) he asked her for a drink, for he was tired from a long walk. She was surprised because in those days there was division between Jews and Samaritan. We never find out if the woman did give Jesus a drink, but we do find Jesus turning her question around and saying to the woman,

'If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' (Jn.4:10 NIV)

Joyfully, the woman does receive this living water!

Yes, service

Highlighting the obvious irony of Jesus being thirsty while at the same time as giving out from the water of life, J. Ramsey Michaels reminds us that Jesus both intended and fully desired to drink of God's cup.ⁱⁱ

Jesus had used the picture of a cup with his disciples, picturing the cup as holding the plans of God. It is a well-known picture in scripture, for example in Psalm 23 it is a cup of blessing and in Psalm 116 a cup of salvation. For Jesus in this moment, it was more like a cup of wrath described in Isaiah 51.

Let us accept that the wine vinegar offered to Jesus was meant as a service to him, albeit a tiny one intended to dull the pain, we discover it follows a familiar pattern. Jesus calls his followers into a life of service to God and our neighbour. Whatever we offer will

An Invitation to Service



always be small in contrast to the service that Jesus gave us, throughout his ministry on earth and culminating in his ultimate service of sacrifice, such that the effect of rejecting God, death, is itself overcome and defeated.

Just as Jesus rose again on the third day, so too are we invited into his death and resurrection. (see for example John 11:25-26 and 1 Cor. 15:1-5, 12-19). It is a death to our old selves and of being born by God's Spirit into new life.

What does this life hold for us? It's a big question! What is definite is that we are asked to give a life of service, just as Jesus did and then exemplified by the apostles. The call to that service has long been encapsulated in Jesus' words,

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbour as yourself." All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.' (Matt. 22:37-39 NIV)

Jesus considered it a service for us to serve others with acts of kindness, not to convince him we are good (only God is good) but as a response to his life-giving service to us.

Whether it is a cup of water or an act of service that costs us more time or money, what act of service can you offer to show that Jesus' love is at work in us and our communities?

ⁱ Krish Kandiah, *Living Faith: Invitations from the Cross* (Farnham: CWR, 2019), p.21.

ⁱⁱ J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), pp.961-963.