



Just a Little Fun

Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. And they began saluting him, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

Mark 15:16-24

Bored out of their minds in this godforsaken outpost on the fringe of the empire, the Roman soldiers welcomed any diversion that might get their minds off the monotony of daily life. So, they mounted a mock coronation for the prisoner known as "the king of the Jews." The whole cohort joined in the "fun." Having already been physically broken by a flogging, the soldiers now seek to break the prisoner's spirit.

It's hard for us to imagine such helpless loneliness, to be so physically and emotionally abused, and to have no one, absolutely no one, to show compassion, to offer a gentle word or a kind touch. Jesus was entirely at the mercy of his captors and they showed him no mercy, no mercy at all.

When they had finished with their fun, they led him out to crucify him. Unable to carry his own cross, the soldier's pressed a passerby into carrying it for him. Crucifixion was a slow and painful death with prisoners sometimes lasting days at a time on a cross before succumbing to the ravages of exposure, dehydration and physical exhaustion.

What they did to Jesus was not uncommon. Crosses dotted the landscape at the "place of the skull." Can you imagine it? Can you? Even in his death Jesus identified with the lost, the least among us.

*When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride.
Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small;
love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all. Amen.*

Isaac Watts