

Scripture Reading: Luke 22:51

Jesus responded, "Stop! No more of this!" He touched the slave's ear and healed him.

I have always loved Bible stories. Having been raised in the church since pre-kindergarten days and continuing mostly unabated since then, I now rarely hear or read a Bible story with which I am not at least vaguely familiar. Perhaps because of this familiarity, I often try to imagine what became of some of the lesser characters in such stories, particularly New Testament characters after they have experienced an unexpected encounter with Jesus.

One of the more intriguing such characters from the Lenten events was Malchus, the slave of the Jewish High Priest, with his ear cut off during the arrest of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. All four gospels report that Caiaphas, the High Priest, had sent out a group of thugs, armed with clubs and swords, to arrest Jesus upon the signal of Judas Iscariot. Malchus, who must have been a highly trusted slave, had likely been sent by the Jewish leaders to observe and report on the events of the arrest, and he could not have been expecting that any harm would come to him in this rather straightforward assignment. As it turned out, however, although Jesus offered no resistance to His arrest, the crowd of His supporters were far more passionate, and one of them (Peter, according to John's account) drew a sword and sliced off the right ear of the undoubtedly astonished Malchus! Jesus instantly admonished everyone to put away their swords and "calm down" (in today's vernacular).

What followed for the stunned Malchus, however, had to be the most shocking and transforming few moments of his entire life. For, according to Luke, Jesus promptly "healed" (which I have always understood to mean *reattached*) Malchus' ear. In just a few hours, Malchus had gone from probably eager anticipation at the prospect of seeing up close this increasingly well known "hill prophet" (who some also believed to be a sorcerer) who had been causing his master so much consternation for several months, to having his ear suddenly and shockingly sliced from his head, and then just as suddenly and shockingly having it instantly restored -- and restored by the very person his master was seeking to destroy!

What must it have been like for Malchus to be standing face-to-face with Jesus, so close he would have undoubtedly felt His breath as Jesus restored his ear? How would Malchus have reacted to looking straight into the most profoundly loving and compassionate eyes mankind has ever seen? How would Malchus have felt about Jesus' warm and tender hands touching, probably stroking, his face and gently grasping his shoulders as Jesus went about the healing process? Jesus would have spoken to Malchus with words of comfort and reassurance, without a hint of animosity over Malchus' role in His arrest. What would that supremely calm voice have sounded like to Malchus, especially when Malchus was frantically trying to make sense out of the chaotic events that had just happened to him?

After this, how would Malchus describe this Jesus person and His loving compassion to Caiaphas and his associates or to Malchus' family and friends? Probably Malchus would have witnessed the trial of Jesus and observed Jesus' fearless, but lovingly compassionate demeanor during the trial. Perhaps Malchus also witnessed the crucifixion, but even if not, his heart must have cried endless tears over the tortuous death of such a gentle and loving man. And just as surely, Malchus' heart must have leapt in boundless joy at the reports of Jesus' resurrection two days later.

One can only speculate about whether Malchus ever came to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, as His apostles were boldly proclaiming after Jesus' death. But for certain, Malchus surely must have spent the rest of his life eagerly and joyously telling anyone who would listen of his amazing encounter with Jesus, the most loving and compassionate person to ever walk this earth!

For me, the shamefully troubling part of this Malchus story is why can't I be more like Malchus in eagerly telling others of my relationship with our Lord and Savior? My relationship has been just as personal and just as real as Malchus' (although admittedly not as "up close") -- and I have experienced the joy and assurance of our Lord and Savior essentially my entire life, rather than just the few moments of Malchus' encounter with Jesus. I am far more certain than Malchus ever could have been that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God! Why then am I so reticent to eagerly share with others (especially my friends!) who do not seem to know Jesus well, the joy of my life-long relationship with our Lord and Savior? Am I not shortchanging them by not more eagerly sharing my story like Malchus must have done?

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the joy of your presence in our lives. Help us, please, to be far more *alert* to opportunities to share that joy with others who do not know you as we do, and especially please give us the *eagerness* to share and the *confidence* to know you will help us to be effective as we seek to do so. Amen.

~ Submitted by Dan Bell for the Thirty-fifth Reading of Lent