

A very wealthy man from Arimathea came to me several seasons ago. He wanted me to carve a tomb out of the side of a rock hill for him. At first, I had my doubts about such a request. But after he told me how much he was willing to spend for my services ...well, I knew at that point I could work something out. So the wealthy man and I went to see the hillside out of which he envisioned this tomb could be hewn. "It's solid rock," I thought to myself. "This will take an eternity for me to chisel out enough space for someone to be buried in here." However, since the man from Arimathea said he was willing to pay me daily while I worked on his tomb AND upon completion he promised a large bonus ... how could I refuse?

I only completed my work on the tomb earlier this week. It has taken me many seasons since that wealthy man first approached me until I finished his confounded tomb. I tell you I did nothing else the entire time. All my regular business and projects were either scrapped, or put on hold, or people sought out other masons to do work for them. But even though I lost a lot of clients, I broke most of my tools, and my back will never be quite the same from working in such awkward positions ...the man from Arimathea paid me handsomely. I will never want for anything ever again.

So really the wealthy man who paid me to hew the tomb for him did me quite a favor. Now I can pick and choose what jobs I want to do and which ones I want to refuse. In fact, having a nice big financial nest egg has freed me up to be more selective in my artistic work. I no longer have to simply shape stones for walls or for building structures. Now I work only on ornamental columns for the palace of the governor or the other rich Romans in the area. My favorite masonry work is done on these ornate capitals ...which is what I am working on here. This particular piece will be placed on the top of a pillar which is located in the antechamber of the governor's bathing room.

I also chisel out the columns and pilasters upon which these ornate capitals sit ...but working in detail on creations such as this is what I truly love. It's artistic. Heaven forbid I should ever be forced to hew out another one of those tombs. There is nothing artistic about that sort of work. Except, of course, for the seal. That I am quite proud of. The seal is the stone which I cut into a rounded shape so that several very powerful men could roll it to close up the tomb. It took a very long time to calculate it just right and to shape the stone so it would fit tightly into the tomb opening. That was as much artistic work as was required of that job. Otherwise, each day I worked on the tomb was routine.

Unlike working in detail on these capitals, which I consider to be creating art, chiseling that tomb was tediously monotonous and boring ...and besides, it was creepy. After all, I sat or laid down in that tomb for many, many days in a row. My friends joked with me telling me that I'm lucky. "Just think of the poor dead loser who will be put in there after he dies," they reminded me. "Unlike that one, at least you get to walk out of the tomb alive every day." I suppose they had a good point. But they might think differently if they knew what I know now.

I tell you, I just cannot figure it out. I spent months working on that tomb and there is no way that once that sealing stone was placed at the opening anyone man could roll it away and open the tomb. Well, anyway, chiseling out a tomb for all those days with all that time to myself to think, I was prompted to consider the meaning of death and dying. I am a fairly young man in good health, so I have never really given it much thought. But when you're in a tomb for so long ...well, it's hard not to think about death. I am no expert on how the body works, but I have observed that, in order to keep living, my body has to breathe in and out. Even though I can't see what is going in my body or what is coming out, I know that I am bringing something into my body which is necessary to sustain my life. Breathing has something to do with keeping me alive. Also, I have had many cuts in my skin on several parts of my body over the years and I have noticed that each time the skin is cut, blood oozes out.

My grandmother used to say, "Blood is God's tears and the tears are medicine, so that when your skin is cut, God is crying to heal your wound." I understand that blood too has to have something to do with keeping me alive. I know this because I have seen when people die. They no longer breathe and their blood stops flowing. Life is a very powerful thing indeed. But my experience tells me that death is even more powerful, because in the end, life always seems to give up to death. So the reason this rich man from Arimathea paid me handsomely to hew a tomb in the side of that rock hill was for the purpose of placing a body in it which had stopped breathing and bleeding ...a body which had no more life in it ...a body which was dead. He said it was meant to be his tomb someday.

This morning I received word from a neighbor that this wealthy man from Arimathea placed someone else's body in the tomb. Apparently this someone else was a criminal who had been crucified on Golgotha a few days ago. My neighbor says that this criminal had been given the extreme treatment as far as punishment goes. She says he had been flogged, they had cruelly put a crown made of thorns on his head and dressed him in a scarlet robe mocking him as some sort of king, they had beat him with their fists, and finally, they crucified him by nailing his hands and feet to a cross of wood. She says it took only three hours for him to die. Then, my neighbor tells me that a very wealthy man from Arimathea, along with several women and a few men, had the body taken down off the cross and carried to a tomb ...as you may have figured out, the tomb which I have just finished. They placed the body in it and rolled the rounded stone I worked so hard to shape in front of that tomb to seal off the opening. My neighbor says that Roman soldiers were placed at the tomb to guard it from anyone getting in and anyone getting out. I had to question her about the anyone getting out part.

"Wasn't he dead?" I asked. "Of course he was dead," she assured me. "But before he died there was some talk that he said he would come back to life after three days." "Come on," I said. "Who was this man to say such things?" My neighbor went on to say that this person who had been crucified and was now buried in that tomb was claiming to be the Son of God. And people were rallying around his many signs that he might come back to life. He had been healing the ill and lame. He had been forgiving the sins of the humble in God's name. He had been telling people that the kingdom of God was very near. He said they could witness it in him and in the things that he did and in the words that he spoke. And people were suggesting that this was the one for whom they had waited to free them from their sin. And, according to my neighbor, this Son of God person promised that on the third day of his death ...he would rise back out of his grave.

So that's why the Roman guard. But I can tell you, once that stone is set in front of that tomb ...it will take no less than ten men to move it again. He's not coming back out of there. Besides, I said that life is a powerful thing but death is even more powerful. I can't even begin to imagine the sort of power it would take to come back to life from death. Why, that sort of power ...could come from only one source I know of ...that would be from God.

And this Son of God person they crucified. Why would the wealthy man from Arimathea bury him in his very own newly-hewn tomb? He was supposed to be a criminal. Wasn't he? Well... it doesn't matter. That's the rich man's business. Besides, there is absolutely no way the dead man is coming back out of that tomb. So I guess my friends were right. At least I got to walk out of that tomb alive. This Son of God person surely will not.