

The Cloak

People would say I'm off my head. Maybe I am. This isn't the best place to keep your senses. But I know this old cloak brings me peace, and mad or not, no one will deny me that. Oh, I know it's probably not the cloak. Look at it. It's threadbare at the arms: torn here where the pocket used to be: and it could do with a wash, though it would no doubt fall apart in the water - especially the way our Miriam washes things. Most people in my position would have thrown it out long ago. But I can't part with it. I put it on my shoulders and instantly - peace !

It's memories, of course, but the peace is still real. This old cloak is truly as full of memories as it is of peace. My sacrifice cloak I call it. It was a Passover gift from Miriam, my sister. It began its life with a sacrifice.

My little smallholding had been through a bad time. I'd been sick with fever on and off all through planting. We'd missed the best of the early rains, and the crops didn't catch up. Then we had blight on the vines. I had to buy in from other smallholders around Bethany to keep my Jerusalem shop supplied and there's little enough profits in that.

Miriam complained so often about my old cloak. "There's more patch than cloak," she would say. Then I discovered she'd been sewing night after night into the early hours to save money to buy the material and then to sew the cloak herself. It really was beautiful. "It's a Passover gift," she said.

Then it became my sacrifice. We'd always been friendly with Lazarus and his sisters. Jesus was very special to them. Whenever he visited they asked Miriam and me to join them, to meet him and hear him. We were completely won over to his Kingdom. I even thought about becoming one of his close disciples. The whole village respected Lazarus's family and revered Jesus for what he had done for them.

I don't know how it all came about, but we were only too glad to be around that morning when Jesus had his Royal procession. He had the idea of riding into Jerusalem on a donkey like Zechariah the prophet said. We all wanted his Kingdom of Love and Peace to come. We were rather naive in how we understood it would happen, but Jesus knew that. So we joined in the parade. I went home for the cloak - I wanted to look my best and be counted among Jesus' men.

The people turned the ride into a royal procession, by gathering palm branches to wave. Soon everyone was shouting and praising God - women and children too. Then, suddenly someone shouted - "A carpet for the King !" and people stripped off their robes and cloaks and laid them down under the donkey's feet. It took me a few moments to surrender mine. First time on. What would Miriam say ? Then I was so overwhelmed by my emotions, - so thrilled by Jesus, I knew I had to make the sacrifice. I slipped off the cloak and without another thought laid it down gladly. It was as though I was giving myself. I could have been still in that cloak. I was ready to do anything for him. At the same time I must admit I thought, "How do I explain this to Miriam ?"

I'm sure he knew my thoughts. As he passed Jesus looked at me. He gave a smile of gratitude, and then it was as though he was speaking in my mind. "Take it to Martha." That's what I did. She understood, and she tidied it up. Miriam didn't know till ages afterwards.

It was that day after the Sabbath in the week before Passover that my future was sealed really. Some of the High Priest's men were my customers and knew me quite well. They were there when we arrived in the city. Ever since they have tried every way to throw me into prison and get rid of me.

So much has happened since that day of the cloak. Jesus' death and his rising to life again; those amazing days when we never knew when we would see him. Then Pentecost and the power of Jesus with us. I was in the thick of it. I've been in on all the thrills and the sufferings. All the while this cloak has been my strength - my peace. In a strange way it's my link with the Master.

It real is incredible.. what has happened in so short a time - the amazing growth of converts to the Way - the persecution - the organising of the house groups - Peter's missions - James' death....and Stephen's... Every day more followers are moving out of the city for safety.... I should have gone I suppose.. but where to ? Now they've caught up with me and it's too late. T

Yet still, even here, I feel his presence...and his peace. There's one thing I know: Tomorrow morning I shall be with him again. At cock-crow that door will open. They will lead me out and I shall see the dawn -for the last time. I don't know how death will come. I hope it is by the sword - quickly. If they grant me a wish I know what I shall ask for. To wear this cloak. It will give me strength and then it will be stained with my blood, and again it will be part of my sacrifice. It was destined for that. I wish I could take the cloak , with all its patches and its stains, and lay it at his feet again. But then no, that won't matter. I'll be able to put myself there. I'll kneel at his feet - and I shall have his peace.