

Blogging toward Friday: Imperfect witness

By [David Keck](#)

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*This week, we're posting three lectionary blog posts: [Maundy Thursday's yesterday](#), [Good Friday's today](#), and [Easter Sunday's tomorrow](#). For more commentary on the readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page, which includes current *Living by the Word* columns as well as past magazine and blog content. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.*

The readings for Good Friday conclude with tender and brave acts of love (John 19:38-42). Both Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus are cautious—Joseph is a secret disciple of Jesus, and Nicodemus had come to Jesus in the night, perhaps with a hood over his head and looking over his shoulder the whole way. Yet these two hesitant men demonstrate courage. Joseph asks for the body, and Nicodemus brings “a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds.” They clean and care for his body, and prepare him for burial.

Good Friday services are emotionally intense, and they can seem exhausting. It is agonizing to witness the horrors of Jesus’ suffering and to acknowledge our own sinfulness. But somehow our worship does not add to the exhaustions of our daily life. Instead, a quiet repose descends, and we sense a kind of renewal. I wonder if this peace which passes understanding comes in part from the way the story draws to a close.

Joseph and Nicodemus remind us that even the most hesitant and furtive followers of Jesus are capable of devoted gestures of love, tender acts of witness that make a difference. During the service, we may identify with Peter as we remember all the ways in which we have turned away from Jesus. But perhaps at some level we also see ourselves in these two men at the end of the story. We know that we are capable of acts of bravery, at least sometimes. We are indeed capable of caring for dying loved ones, though we never look forward to doing so.

We are not heroic, perfect Christians. But we don’t have to be.