

CROWN OF THORNS, CROWN OF VICTORY

By Larry Hiller

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August in the Holy Land. Around us the ruins of Capernaum shimmered in the afternoon heat. It was a fascinating place to be, but our guide and a nearby cicada had both been droning for some time, and my mind began to wander.

Suddenly I was alert as the guide pointed to the tree that shaded us and said offhandedly, “They call that the ‘crown of thorns’ tree.” I looked up at the leafy branches. Where were the thorns? Reaching, I gingerly pulled a small branch closer.

There, among the delicate leaves, I saw the thorns. Slender and green, wickedly sharp and as long as my thumb, they couldn’t be seen from more than a few feet away. But anyone coming into contact with one of those leafy twigs would certainly feel pain.

I thought of the many paintings I had seen of the Savior standing before a mockery of a court, robed in purple and wearing a crown of twisted, dry, thorny vines. Suddenly it occurred to me that a slave or soldier tasked with making that crown might want to work with supple green branches like those of the tree overhead—not with brittle, dry twigs. More tellingly, the purpose of the crown was not just to inflict pain but to taunt and mock.

In the ancient world a green, leafy crown or



For me the crown of thorns has become a symbol of the Savior’s awareness of all our hidden pains—and His ability to heal them.

wreath—usually of fragrant laurel leaves—was often given to the winners of contests and battles. Laurel wreaths adorned the images of kings and emperors. Perhaps the cruel crown pressed down on the Savior’s brow was leafy and green in sardonic reference to that ancient honor. It’s just supposition, not a matter of doctrine. But for me, visualizing it that way brings one aspect of the Atonement more clearly into focus: the Savior is aware of our sorrows, and He is able to heal us.

The robe placed on Him was a mocking symbol of royalty. It covered the welts and gashes of the scourging He had just suffered. In the same way, a leafy crown of thorns would appear to be a victor’s garland but would actually hide the pain it inflicted.

So many of us bear unseen hurts. The hymn teaches that “in the quiet heart is hidden sorrow that the eye can’t see” (“Lord, I Would Follow Thee,” *Hymns*, no. 220). But the Savior *does* see. He is well acquainted with private anguish. His whole ministry was lived in anticipation of the Atonement and Resurrection. Yet those He taught and blessed and healed did not know. Even His own disciples remained unaware.

The Savior sees past the “robes” and “crowns” that mask our sorrows from others. Having suffered “pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind,” He is full of mercy and knows how to succor us when we lay our burdens at His feet (see Alma 7:11–12). His is the balm that can heal even deep and hidden wounds. And the crown He holds out to us is truly the victor’s. ■