

Church of the Divine Love

Sermon Holy Saturday April 16, 2022

Job 14:1-14; Psalm 31:1-4,15-16; 1 Peter 4:1-8; John 19:38-42

Sisters and brothers in Christ,

Jesus is dead. His body is in the tomb. We weren't there that day, but we know what it is like when life takes us to the edge. It is a border where you know you cannot go back to the way things were. Life has changed. A loved one has died. A relationship has ended. A dream has forever been shattered. The life we so carefully planned has fallen apart. The walls of our security have been breached. What used to be is no longer. There's nothing to go back to. This is life on the edge. The disciples knew that edge. So do we. The tragedy of the crucifixion is past, but the glories of the resurrection are not yet here. We are neither here nor there. We are stuck in the middle. What was is no more and what will be is not yet clear or known. It feels as if there is nowhere to go and nothing to do.

Holy Saturday comes to us in many ways, but it always seems to involve death; the death of Jesus, the death of a loved one, the death of a relationship, the death of hopes and dreams. In the church calendar Holy Saturday is one day once per year. Not so in life. Those of you who have suffered the death of a loved one know that you do not move from Good Friday to Easter Sunday in just one day. Holy Saturday can last months, years, even a lifetime. Holy Saturday calls us to the tomb. Where else is there to go?

That's where Mary Magdalene and the other Mary are today. Joseph of Arimathea took Jesus' body wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, laid it in the tomb, rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb, and went away. He left. Some will do that in the Holy Saturday of life. They will close up the tomb and walk away as if there is nothing there, no possibilities for anything new. The two women, however, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, are sitting opposite the tomb. They are silent. There is not much to say on Holy Saturday. What can be said? There are no easy or satisfactory answers.

Holy Saturday is a day of silence and stillness, waiting and wondering, remembering, and hoping. Perhaps that is what faithfulness looks like on Holy Saturday. There is not much to do except be present to the reality of what is, to sit opposite the tomb. Where is Christ on Holy Saturday? Reread the Apostles' Creed. Remind yourself that on this day "He descended to the dead" or as another translation says, "He descended into hell." Holy Saturday is when Christ descends into the hell of your life, breaking the bonds of death, and setting the captives free.

Holy Saturday is a difficult day. We so much want joy to replace sorrow. That's not what Jesus does. Instead, sorrow is transformed into joy, the tomb becomes a womb, and death gives birth to new life. Christ's triumph is not apart from death but within death. Christ is trampling down death by death and giving life to those in the tombs. Holy Saturday is all the times in our lives when it feels like the present moment is closing in on us and closing us up. A great stone has been rolled to the door of our future and sealed, guarded by grief, pain, anger, fear, disappointment, regret, confusion, despair.

Has life only changed, or has it ended? I think that's what we want to know in the Holy Saturday of our lives. But we don't know, so we wait. Holy Saturday is an in between day. It's the day after Good Friday and the day before Easter. What was is no longer and what will be is not yet. If Good Friday is the day of the loss, Holy Saturday is that day when the reality of the loss begins to set in. And I'll bet you know

what that's like. Holy Saturday is the day after. It's the day after the death. It's the day after your heart broke, the day after he died, the day after the relationship ended, the day after the job was lost, the day after the diagnosis, the day after a dream was shattered, the day after a part of your life, a part of yourself, has died.

I wish I could tell you that Holy Saturday lasts only one day, but I can't. It may be one day on the church's calendar but rarely is it only one day on the calendar of our lives. Holy Saturday is a time of waiting. How long O Lord, how long? It's a time of wondering when it will get better, or if it will ever get better. It's a time of asking what's next and whether there will even be a next. It's a time when there's not much to say or there's everything to say and no words with which to say it. Either way it's a time of silence, the kind of silence that leaves you empty and restless.

It is tempting in the Holy Saturday of our lives to run away, to leave the tomb and just get to Easter. But the tomb is the birthplace of Easter, the workshop of resurrection. Tragedy, sorrow, and death do not simply go away or get replaced. They are transformed. In that holy workshop Christ transforms tragedy into triumph, sorrow into joy, and death into life. We must, therefore, remain present to the tomb of Holy Saturday. That's what Mary Magdalene and the other Mary are doing.

The thing that strikes me about today's gospel is that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary waited but Joseph of Arimathea went away after he rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb. Do you remember who were the first to see the empty tomb? Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. The resurrection was so unexpected, that how could one respond in any other way than fear? It was proof, not just that God was vindicating Jesus, that God had intervened on Jesus' behalf, just at the moment of greatest fear and despair. It was, is proof, that God is making things new, that God's power and love are transforming the world, bringing about a reign of justice and peace.

They may have fled from the tomb in fear and amazement, and told no one, but in the end, they did tell what they had seen. Thanks be to God. Their fear was overcome by joy, and the good news burst forth from their lips. May our silence and fear also give way to joy, and may we also shout out the good news: Alleluia! Christ is Risen! The two women of Holy Saturday will become the first people Jesus greets on Easter Sunday. So, trust the silence and the waiting. Be still. Remember, wonder, hope. Pray. It is Holy Saturday and your Lord who loves you is at work. **Amen.**