

Holy Saturday

Matt 27: 56 – 66

Jesus in the tomb



Holy Saturday – the Sabbath – the holy day of rest, decreed by God from the beginning of the world, as the Jewish religion taught. In Christianity Holy Saturday is traditionally a day of quiet, rest and reflection after the pain of Good Friday. Perhaps we can imagine ourselves seated with the two Marys outside the sealed tomb, gazing in silence on the stone which conceals Jesus' body and feeling in our hearts the silence that resides behind the stone – the silence into which Jesus at his death has passed.

On the other hand, I guess that many of us have often spent this day – the day before Easter Sunday – doing anything but resting. Perhaps we have been preparing our home for visitors or perhaps we have been preparing extra-special services for worship the following day. And many, of course, even in 'ordinary' times will have to work, in hospitals and care homes, in the emergency services and retail. The gardening and other recreational activity of one half of society often seems to involve the working activity of the other half. And at this time of lockdown due to the coronavirus this division between 'work' and 'rest' is thrown into stark relief as some members of our society are working flat out in demanding and dangerous circumstances whilst the rest of us make our contribution either by staying at home and 'working hard' at trying to resist the temptation to idleness or, if we are able, by volunteering our help to the needy and vulnerable at a time of national crisis.

But to be keeping today in the midst of the challenges that surround us can be, like many of the other challenges which face us today, an opportunity if we choose to make it so. One of the purposes of spending time in reflection, as we have been doing as we journey through Holy Week, is to enable us to slow down and take notice of what is happening – both in the life of our Lord and in the life of the world around us. The call to sit still and simply *be* alongside others, or to spend time *within* events as they unfold, is a thread that runs through the Bible and, indeed, through most of the world's great religions. As the great story of creation in Genesis reminds us, spending time looking at the world and seeing it as 'very good' is a vital part of God's purposes. But there is also importance in spending time reflecting on the darker areas of life, and this too is part of our religious tradition, from the writings of the prophets to the expressions of distress in many of the psalms through to the frightening, apocalyptic visions of John of Patmos. All of these writings have their origin in the reflective meditations of the past and have given us a treasury of accumulated wisdom that the world is ever in need of. And there is no reason to think that this way of doing things is necessarily a thing only of the past.

Many people today are hearing a deep call from God to spend time in this way as we seek to bring good for our time out of ancient wisdom. Reflection and meditation, prayer and contemplation are as

important today as ever and perhaps it is on Holy Saturday, especially this year, that we may hear, even more clearly than usual, the call to be part of this movement.

Through the course of this Holy Week we have been using the poem by W H Vanstone, 'Love's Endeavour, Love's Expense', to frame some of our thinking and yesterday we reflected on the final stanza as we stood at the foot of the cross and watched Jesus die. So today, perhaps, is a good opportunity to spend time in quiet and reflection with the two Marys outside the 'stone-cold tomb' and to look back over this Holy Week with the aid of the whole of Vanstone's poem – and to pray with him and with the two Marys for the dawning of the light tomorrow morning:

Morning glory, starlit sky/ soaring music, scholars' truth/ flight of swallows, autumn leaves/ memory's treasure, grace of youth.

Open are the gifts of God / gifts of love to mind and sense / hidden is love's agony / love's endeavour, love's expense

Love that gives, gives ever more / gives with zeal, with eager hands / spares not, keeps not, all outpours / ventures all, its all expends

Drained is love in making full / bound in setting others free / poor in making many rich / weak in giving power to be.

Therefore he who shows us God /helpless hangs upon the tree / and the nails and crown of thorns /tell of what God's love must be.

Here is God, no monarch he / throned in easy state to reign / here is God, whose arms of love / aching, spent, the world sustain.

A prayer:

Lord of all wisdom and power, who made the world to be both beautiful and frightening, look with mercy on us today as we struggle to make sense of what is happening across the globe. Help us, as we reflect on the journey of your Son through the last days of his earthly life, to be united with him in sorrow at the brokenness of the world and in wonder at its fragility. Help us to understand more deeply how much you love us and the world we live in, and help us to allow more of your love to flow through us into the darkness that presses so heavily around us today. We pray that in these days of pain and suffering Godly wisdom may be grown and developed, so that in due time the light of your goodness may shine the more brightly throughout all the universe. We ask this in the name of your son Jesus Christ, who died and was laid in the tomb, but who now lives forever, bringing wisdom, light and love to all the world. Amen