

Saturday 11th April 2020

The Way of the Cross – Station 14: The tomb

A reading from the Gospel according to Mark.

Then Joseph brought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb.

Mark 15:46

Holy Saturday is often a much forgotten about day. It's not one that we often talk about. On Good Friday we mark the act of the cross and then we wait for Sunday – often forgetting the day that lies in-between. Yet it does speak of something to us. It's the day when everything seemed lost and hope had disappeared from earthly view.

I often wonder what the disciples would have been thinking after Jesus had been taken down from the cross. The feeling of despair that must have been going through their minds. They had given up their jobs to follow this carpenter. Their great leader – the one who was supposed to be the messiah, a man who would lead Israel out of the darkness and into the light was now laying lifeless in a tomb. What must Joseph of Arimathea have been thinking as he took the lifeless body of the Son of man to rest? Seemingly rolling a large stone over the hope that so many of the followers of Jesus had. Of course, we know how the story ends, but it's easy to forget that in that moment, it was not going to be much comfort to them.

St. Paul's quote of 'death where is your sting?' (1 Cor 15:55) is often used by many Christians in the light of loss, but perhaps sometimes a little crassly. It's a quote that is true, but one we need to use carefully. In the context of the full Christian hope, then of course it's appropriate. But for so many Christians here on earth death can leave a temporary sting.

Last year I lost a dear friend far too young, and he used that phrase of St. Paul in his last days as we spent time together. It was appropriate for him, and I know where he is. I know there will be a day when I will go to join him. Death has lost its sting in his case. However, those of us who were left behind are now in our Holy Saturday experience. We are in the in-between, the waiting

and the longing for Easter Sunday to come. We know it's coming, but right now the experience is hard.

If Holy Saturday teaches us anything, it's that loss is still a part of the human experience. For many of us, there will be our forebears who have gone before us and we will, rightly, miss them. There will be injustices in loss; Some would have gone before their time and some of our brothers and sisters would have died in countries where their deaths are not even recorded or known by many.

Yet, Easter Sunday is coming. It is on the way. Whatever our disappointments in the present – those lost to us now – will be breathed back into life. This is of course one of the great hopes of the gospel. But living in the now and not yet of Jesus' kingdom means that, for a time, the Holy Saturday experience is one that we will all likely have to face.

We have one advantage over the disciples though, which is knowing that what we see before us is not the end. The night is darkest before the dawn, but that dawn will approach. Jesus is coming back and we live in eager anticipation for that day. We are the people of the resurrection, the children of God and the brothers and sisters of the slain and risen king! So, if Holy Saturday is an experience you are in, don't ignore it, but just remember that like the disciples, you are in the middle of something far greater than you can imagine.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, Lord of life, you became nothing for us:
Be with those who feel worthless and as nothing in the world's eyes.
You were laid in a cold, dark tomb and hidden from sight:
Be with all who suffer and die in secret,
Hidden from the eyes of the world.
To you, Jesus, your rigid body imprisoned in a tomb,
Be honour and glory with the father and the Holy Spirit,
Now and forever.
Amen.