

While We Wait

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Hebrews 10:16-25

John 18:1-19:42

Psalms 22

“And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.” The Jewish day of Preparation is the day before the sabbath. We all know that Jews had to cease all work on the sabbath, but have you ever considered how much work it is to cease all work for a whole day? If you go to Jerusalem, even today, Friday is still considered the day of preparation for the coming Sabbath, which falls on Saturday, not Sunday. As the day stretches and approaches dusk, the market vendors begin selling off their produce at increasingly slashed prices. That market won't be open the next day, and the produce will spoil if not sold, so the marketplace becomes frenzied as the day draws to a close. The same holds true in Jewish homes as families make final preparations for the Shabbat supper. In the Jewish world, unlike our way of thinking, the day begins at sundown. So, the work of preparation must be concluded before night fell. Once the sun sets, the day of rest begins.

On the day of Jesus' crucifixion, the people who had loved Jesus had to face their own preparations for the Sabbath. Normally, Jewish custom would expect an elaborate production of caring for a deceased loved one's body before placing them in a tomb, but the timing complicated this in Jesus' case. So, two of Jesus' secret disciples, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus worked together to secure a tomb and begin the anointing of Jesus body before they too must race home before darkness fell.

On Easter morning, we will celebrate the risen Christ, the Messiah. But on Good Friday, we bow before the incarnate, human man. Everything about this story elevates the dignity of humanity through Jesus' life and death, existing in human flesh, subject

to all its weaknesses and frailties, yet uncorrupted by the brutality of others directed at him. Jesus allowed himself, even at the worst moments of his life, to be moved by God rather than against the injustices assaulting him. We see Jesus betrayed by a friend and then dragged back and forth between the judgments of various political figures. We feel his body attacked by fists, whips, and thorns. We hear his voice acknowledging thirst. We watch his side pierced with a soldier's spear. And we gaze at the tender care taken to remove his lifeless body from the cross, move it to the tomb, and wrap it with linen and spices.

As Jesus demonstrated dignity in the face of evil, we also observe the human characters, experiencing the same turmoil, moved by malevolence rather than God. We watch as the disciples and soldiers fight over Jesus' life. We feel the chill of the disciples gathered around fires in the courtyard as they hide, accuse, and wait for judgment to fall. We identify the way Peter's fear of exposure causes him to deny Jesus, repeatedly. We observe political figures wrangling over authority, boundary lines, and titles, and the savagery and greed of soldiers with power unleashed against the innocent.

This story sounds like the stories we hear on the news. We can identify the players. We can point fingers at those we identify as evil and name those who garner our sympathy. We comfort ourselves by believing we would have behaved better than the villains. But, deep down, we know our own proclivity to protect ourselves at the expense of others. We know our own desire to stand with a crowd, in agreement, solidarity, and safety, stirred by the latest outrage, assuming the guilt of the one at whom our outrage is aimed. It's easier to name a scapegoat than confront our own failures. Casting blame at others creates a convenient shield to hide our own.

This story offers us a peek inside a single day's events. In it, if we're willing to be honest, we can identify glimpses of ourselves, both the elevation and the degradation

of our own human condition. And so, with all of humanity, on Good Friday, we stand outside the tomb, waiting in the dark. We mourn. And we make use of the Day of Preparation because, unlike the people in this story, we know what comes next.

Anyone who has stood outside the grave of a loved one knows the pull that grave holds. We know the risk we feel in allowing ourselves to be consumed and overcome by grief. We also know the desire to run from that graveside, busying ourselves with tasks to avoid feeling that pull. But we do not grieve over Jesus like those who have no hope. Jesus' descent into death provided for the elevation of our humanity into life. Jesus came in a human body and gave himself to death to illustrate the value God places on our lives. And so, we accept the grace of Jesus life and death with gratitude. We honor his sacrifice by being honest about our need for it, and by receiving it.

When Jesus died, the veil in the temple that divided humans from the divine, was ripped in half from top to bottom. God opened the way for us into relationship with divinity. And our response is not to curl up in despair over our failures, but to reach our hand through that torn veil and grasp towards Sunday, Resurrection Day.

Because our humanity is a gift, because Jesus dignified humanity for us and for all mankind, we respond by honoring the days Jesus spent in the grave. We make preparation for Easter by considering the weight of the grave and responding accordingly. We live in a divided, fearful, and angry world. This past year, our country has been marked by polarization and alienation in a profound way. Jesus came to heal our divisions, but Christianity in America has become a byword for disunity and tribalism. Our hearts have been ravaged by our anger against what we see as the harm caused by others. Jesus came, and willingly died under the injustice of evil, without retaliation or justification. He showed us true humility, so we could understand that the way of the cross, the way of love, is about setting aside our divisions, entrusting ourselves to God and moving towards other people. Today is Good Friday. It was

Preparation Day for the Jews, and it is our preparation day as well. This is our final opportunity for deep reflection before we celebrate the risen Lord.

In a moment we will pray the Solemn Collects, lifting up ourselves and our world, elevating the lives of all whom God has made. Let us allow our hearts to be moved to feel those prayers today and then act them out into our world. Jesus dignified humanity so that we might become the fullest versions of restored humanity. Following the example of Jesus into the grave, means being prepared to follow him back out again into resurrected life.

As we reverence the cross today, confessing our sins, seeking forgiveness, and grieving the death of God's son, may we be a people who take preparation seriously. May we feel for the movement of God in our hearts and allow ourselves to be moved by God's invitations to enact God's Kingdom with intentional choices as we live into the world God is restoring through our very hands.