

Psalm 31.1-16

A Reflection for Holy Saturday – 11th April 2020

John 19.38-42

Holy Saturday, sandwiched as it is between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, could be thought to suffer from middle child syndrome – unregarded because its older and younger siblings are more obviously interesting: Good Friday, the day when Jesus's victory over evil was won at the cost of unimaginable suffering and Easter Sunday, the day of rejoicing, when that victory was made known to Jesus's followers by the angels, the empty tomb and the appearance of the risen Lord.

But Holy Saturday has its own particular identity. And it is worth dwelling on and thinking about in this year of all years. Holy Saturday is important for three reasons, I think, and I would like us to reflect on each of them.

It is the day after Good Friday. The day when the sense of desolation has settled. The day when grief is every bit as real as on Good Friday but when even the distraction of the spectacle and sharing in that sorrow is denied the disciples and us. It is as if we and they retreat into our private grief, recrimination and sorrow. What was my part in Jesus's death? Could it have turned out differently if I had been braver, truer, stronger? (A question for Peter, Judas, the other 10 disciples and the crowds who had cheered Jesus just 6 days earlier, possibly even for Pontius Pilate). It is a question for us too as we call to mind the words of the hymn,

'Behold the man upon a cross:

My sin upon His shoulders;

Ashamed I hear my mocking voice

Call out among the scoffers.

It was my sin that held Him there

Until it was accomplished;

His dying breath has brought me life:

I know that it is finished.'

It is the day before Easter Sunday. Now we know what Jesus's first disciples could not have known, that the next day would bring amazement, joy and relief. Amazement because the unimaginable good news had actually happened; joy because the one good man had defeated all the evil that the authorities, the Romans and Satan could throw at him; and relief because we really are forgiven for our part in Jesus's death.

And in this season of anxiety and suffering for our country and our world, we are reminded of the simple message of Easter that good is stronger than evil. There will be an 'after' to the Coronavirus pandemic. Evil has its day but our suffering God has overcome evil. All shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well.

Finally, Holy Saturday is a day out of time. Jesus 'descended to the dead' and 'on the third day he rose again' as we proclaim in the Apostles' Creed. However, we just don't know what was actually going on on Holy Saturday.

For me this is a reminder that God's time is different from our time. Holy Saturday seems like dead time. Nothing that we can see is happening. But God is never on furlough. He is always present to us. Times that seem to us to be useless and frustrating can also be times when God is at work in us and in the situations that trouble us. The words of the Easter Hymn express this well:

Now the green blade rises from the buried grain,
Wheat that in the dark earth many years has lain;
Love lives again, that with the dead has been:
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

So, on this strange 'middle day', let us reflect on our God who uses even the worst of times to draw us to him. Let us remember those great words of St Paul in his letter to the Roman Christians, 'For I am convinced that neither life nor death, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Romans 8.38). Amen.

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