

Holy Saturday

Matthew 27:62-66

The next day, that is after the day of preparation, the Chief Priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, “Sir, we remember what that imposter said while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, ‘He is risen from the dead,’ and the last deception would be worse than the first.” Pilate said to them, “You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can.” So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

Let us pray: Forgive us, when we try to seal you away in a tomb. Forgive us for trying to keep you out of our lives, so all we have to do is remember every once-in-awhile that you had lived once among us, and no longer see you as Immanuel, God with us. Keep us from relegating you into the one who might return someday. Help us to see that you want to live; now and forever. Amen.

“Will You Guard the Tomb?”

Jesus was dead. His body was given to Joseph of Arimathea who had prepared Christ’s body and placed it in a new tomb. The tomb was closed by a large stone rolled over the entrance. It was of enough size and weight that it caused the women later to wonder how they would ever move it out of the way.

The leaders who had worked so hard to be crucified Jesus, now were concerned with grave robbers and the prospects of the disciples claiming that Jesus had arose from the dead. The solution was easy, the sealing to the tomb and the posting of a guard. No one was getting in. So they asked Pilate, “Will you please seal the tomb?”

If Jesus came back alive, this would cause more problems than they already had with him. If Jesus came back alive then his time with us would not be ending. If Jesus was alive, his voice would not be silenced. If Jesus was alive, he could still be actively involve in our world and in our lives.

When Jesus was placed in the tomb, everyone believed that he was done. They watched him say his last words and take his last labored breath. His life was over until the general resurrection when they believed that all the saints would rise. They believed that Jesus’ time with them was over and they all grieved this great loss.

We too grieve the loss of Christ. We too at times live as though we believe that Christ is in the tomb and his life with us is over. At times we may even act as the Chief priests and the Pharisees, and try to keep Jesus sealed away where no one can touch him and so he cannot touch us. We make him part of history, and we fight over its meaning and legacy, and act as if he can do nothing new, our speak a new truth to meet the needs of our day.

At times there is a strange comfort and knowing that our time with Jesus is over. We can keep Jesus at arms length and away from our everyday life. We live as if Jesus is gone and we are on our own.

The tomb is sealed, the guards are posted and we can now go on with our lives, doing what we think is best. We can ask ourselves, “What would Jesus do?” It is not like Jesus is

coming back tomorrow. The second coming will wait until the end of time.

No one is going to fool us into believing that Jesus was right that in three days, he would come again. Without Jesus we have to rely upon our memory, recalling what Jesus said and done. Those were great days, but they are gone for good. We forget that Jesus told us it was only going to get better and that we would not only do all the wonderful things Jesus did, but we would do even more. Our time with Jesus was not over it was only promised to be transformed.

The living Christ was unpredictable. The living Christ turned the way we lived upside down. The living Christ seemed to always be doing something new. Now that he is gone we can take a breath and slow down, and regain control of our lives. This is not true at all.

Because Jesus was never gone. Jesus was busier than ever. Once again Jesus was doing something new. In First Peter 3:18b-20a he wrote: “*Jesus* was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey”. On Holy Saturday, Jesus was not asleep. Jesus was not contained. Jesus was working like he always did, preaching good news to those who were in prison. At least until Jesus kicked the door in and set them free. Jesus was not done with his work of salvation, he was only given a new opportunity. He was finding new ways to conquer sin, death, and the devil.

There are times when we think that Jesus is gone. Jesus is never gone. Some think Jesus is dead in a tomb, but they only saw from the outside, they had not had a chance to look inside yet. The same is true in our lives. When we don't believe the living Christ is here, we are mistaken. Jesus is always at his father's business. Jesus is always sharing good news to those willing to listen. Jesus is always seeking to share blessings with the world. We don't always notice, thinking that he is locked in a guarded tomb, or somewhere far away.

Jesus is not bound by space and time. Jesus was present at the very beginning, when everything was created. In fact without Christ nothing is made. Jesus is alive in the world today. Jesus is also in the future. The book of Revelation describes Jesus as the one who was, and is, and is to come. This was true even when Jesus was in the tomb.

We should never forget that Jesus promised never to leave us and be with us always even to the end of the age. Jesus is not bound. Jesus has always been free. Jesus is always involved in the here and now. In the world there is tribulation, it was for Jesus and it is for us today. The question for us is am I working with what Christ is doing or am I working against what he is doing. We are now like Christ when he was seeking to do only what he saw God doing. Now it is our turn to do only what we see Christ doing today.

Right now Jesus is present to talk with you and walk with you. There is never a gulf between you and the living Christ. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ Jesus our Lord. Not hardship, distress, persecution, famine, extreme poverty, plagues or war. What ever we are going through Christ is going through it right by our side. You cannot seal him away in a tomb. Even then Jesus was at work extending God saving grace.

The disciples were feeling all alone on that miserable Saturday. You might be feeling miserable and alone this Saturday too. Just hang in there and wait and see. Jesus will not be as far away as you thought. Jesus wants you to notice when your hearts are strangely warmed, or notice him ever so briefly in the breaking of the bread. Jesus wants you to notice that he is with us to breathe upon us and wish us peace.

No one can keep him pinned in and no one can keep him away. The theology of the Chief Priests and the Pharisees was wrong, death is not final. Jesus is not gone away for good.

Jesus is and always will be right here. Just wait and see!

Let us pray: Death seems so final. In times like these its reality is quite frightening. We see the sealed tomb of death, open our hearts and minds to experience more! Amen.