

Gordon Presbytery Holy Week Together 11 April 2020



They went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone (Matt 27:66)

CH4 36 Psalm 46:1-2

1. *God is our refuge and our strength
In straits a present aid
Therefore although the earth be moved
We will not be afraid*

In the past, for many of us, Holy Saturday has probably been a quiet day, the day when we are still and wait. The dramatic events of Holy Week have reached their climax with the Good Friday Vigil at the foot of the cross. Physically, emotionally, spiritually, we are spent and, like the first followers of Jesus, obliged to rest. But this year perhaps Holy Saturday carries an added significance as we all find ourselves in a place of grief, and waiting and enforced physical separation from friends, family and loved ones. It is against this background that we come to our reading from Matthew's Gospel.

Bible Reading: St Matthew 27:57-66

57 When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. 58 He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. 59 So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth 60 and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. 61 Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

62 The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate 63 and said, 'Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, "After three days I will rise again." 64 Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, "He has been raised from the dead", and the last deception would be worse than the first.' 65 Pilate said to them, 'You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can.' 66 So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

Reflection

In the Bible, Job asks God the ultimate question, *“If mortals die, will they live again?”* (Job14:14) As the death toll from Covid-19 rises, ultimate questions, questions about the meaning and significance of life take on a new urgency. Suffering, death and grief are often the catalyst for such questions. Why is this happening? What I wonder were the questions which exercised those who played a part in events between Jesus death and resurrection. All of the people Matthew mentions in his Gospel have just witnessed the injustice, the violence and the awfulness of Jesus crucifixion. What questions did they ask?

What question did Joseph of Arimathea ask even as he courageously offered to act as undertaker? Did he pray with sorrow and longing over Jesus lifeless body as he wrapped it in clean linen and placed it carefully in the tomb?

What was Pilate asking himself as he remembered how he had washed his hands of the death of Jesus? How complicit was he in the death of a potentially innocent man? How guilty does he feel? Is that why he agrees to the guard being placed on the tomb?

And what about the group of old men who came to Pilate asking to place that guard on the tomb? Were they just afraid that the disciples would steal Jesus body in order to deceive people? Or were they afraid that Jesus just might rise again and threaten their own position and security as religious leaders? They certainly attempted to make doubly sure that this could not happen. Not only did they put a guard on the tomb, they also sealed the stone in place.

And last but certainly not least – what about the women, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary who have stayed with Jesus, throughout the agony of the crucifixion. They are denied the opportunity of anointing their friend’s body in accordance with the customs of the time. Matthew paints a particularly poignant picture of them watching at a distance while Joseph buried Jesus. In their grief did they ask *“Why?”* Did that question haunt their minds throughout the Sabbath? Did they like Job wonder if Jesus could live again? What did they make of Jesus promise that he would rise again?

Holy Saturday is a day for questions. We all have our own questions. Why? How many of us have prayed with longing for this time of trial to be over? How many of us have wondered if we have had the virus and been responsible for infecting others? How do we protect our families and our livelihoods? At what cost? What do we do when we cannot even say a good farewell to those whom we love? And what will life look like once the restrictions are over? We don’t have the answers to these questions and many others like them. And it does not look as if we will have them any time soon. But perhaps that is alright.

If Holy Saturday has anything to teach us it is that we cannot rush forward into Easter. We must first sit with our questions, and the questions of others. But we do so in the presence of the God whose love is stronger than sin or death or hell and cannot or will not be confined. And for that reason and that reason alone we should never lose hope.

You might like to read the following hymn slowly, reflecting on the meaning of the words as you do so. **CH4 727**

1. *In the bulb there is a flower;
In the seed, an apple tree;
In cocoons a hidden promise:
Butterflies will soon be free!
In the cold and snow of winter
There's a spring that waits to be,
Unrevealed until its season,
Something God alone can see.*

*There's a song in every silence,
Seeking word and melody.
There's a dawn in every darkness,
Bringing hope to you and me.
From the past will come the future,
What it holds a mystery,
Unrevealed until its season,
Something God alone can see.*

*In our end is our beginning;
In our time, infinity;
In our doubt there is believing;
In our life eternity.
In our death a resurrection;
At the last a victory,
Unrevealed until its season,
Something God alone can see.*

You might like to close with the Lord's prayer