

April 3, 2021
Holy Saturday

Lectionary Passages:

Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24

Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16

1 Peter 4:1-8

Matthew 27:57-66



Selected Verses:

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness. – Lamentations 3: 22-23

You are indeed my rock and my fortress;
for your name's sake lead me and guide me,
take me out of the net that is hidden for me,
for you are my refuge. – Psalm 31: 3-4

For this is the reason the gospel was proclaimed even to the dead, so that, though they had been judged in the flesh as everyone is judged, they might live in the spirit as God does. – 1 Peter 4: 6

So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. – Matthew 27: 59-60

Devotional:

When I was in my final year of grad school, I had to take denominational ordination exams. These were four exams that lasted for two hours each. On Friday, I sat for one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Then I did the same on Saturday. Yet, unlike classroom exams, it took two months to get the results. They were read by elders and ministers from a presbytery like Eastern Oregon. For two months, we waited for the results. In the end, I failed one exam, the one in my area of concentration. It was a humbling moment. Fortunately, once you pass one exam, you do not need to take it again. The next time it was offered, I easily passed the exam.

On Holy Saturday, all the followers of Jesus knew they had failed the exam. Judas had betrayed. When he realized the weight of his guilt, he committed suicide. Peter had denied, and along with the other disciples hid in fear of being arrested and killed. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, members of the Sanhedrin had remained silent and allowed the trail to happen. Now that Jesus was dead, Joseph offered his unused family tomb to be Jesus' resting place. Nicodemus anointed the body for burial. Since they were both Jewish leaders, they did not let it out they were followers of Jesus.

Just the variety of followers displays how influential Jesus was in life. Joseph was wealthy if could afford a new tomb within the rock quarry near the city. Archeologists have found the place of the tomb. The tomb was in stone that was too soft to quarry, yet solid enough to sell as tombs. Nicodemus was also a community leader and wealthy. He purchased about 100 pounds of spices to anoint the body for burial. Many of the disciples were fishermen. Honest workers, though some now believe of substantial wealth and position in towns. Judas held the money bag. One was a zealot and wanted to overthrow Rome before following Jesus. The rest little is known about, yet they did not have much financial means. Many scholars today think the women may have been the ones who financially supported Jesus' ministry.

Yet, in end, all had left him to die on the cross. They had not realized it was an exam, that they were being tested. Jesus had prayed that they would not completely fail the test. That they would remain faithful.

On Holy Saturday, they did not realize that Jesus had taken the test for them and passed. Jesus had prayed, "not my will, but yours be done." He had taken the sins of the world upon himself and died. When we read, "the steadfast love of the Lord endures forever," we think the writer is celebrating God's faithfulness. That things are going well. Yet, the passage is of one feeling the abandonment of God. It is similar to the cry Jesus said from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Lamentations states that God "afflicted under God's wrath; driven and brought to darkness; besieged; put me in heavy chains; blocked the way with hewn stones; shut out his prayer."

One would think the words of Lamentations would be words of someone who has turned their back on God. If someone had afflicted me, driven me into darkness, put me in heavy chains, and locked me in prison, I would not trust them in any way. It is after this list that the writer states, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, your mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." It is in the midst of the tomb that God displays His faithfulness and mercies. It is while Jesus is in the darkness that new beginnings is possible. It is in dying for the sins of the world that God can most fully display His faithfulness.

So, while the disciples had failed the test, God had something greater in store. Something that could only come from God—his mercy and faithfulness. That day I got my test results, I lamented, "why did I fail the one in my area of study and expertise?" Maybe it was because I needed to trust God and His faithfulness. Literally, as a result of that failing, Janet and I were able to spend a year living in Scotland. That was the year that we learned that when we trust God and follow Him, God will remain faithful and show us His mercy. For, out of the darkness comes light. Out of the tomb will come life.

Prayer:

Almighty God, there are days that we feel beat up. We feel abandoned, afflicted by your wrath, and driving into darkness and despair. When we fail ourselves, others and especially you, we are often overwhelmed. We cannot image the despair of the disciples on the first Holy Saturday, nor the separation Jesus felt when he took the sins upon himself. May we remember your faithfulness and your mercy is new every morning. Give us the hope to trust you and follow where you call, through the grace of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.