

## **A reflection for Holy Saturday for Curate in Evesham, Prajna Pal-Lad**

Today is Holy Saturday, the time between Jesus's death on the cross and what we now know as Easter Sunday when we witness our resurrected Christ. In this podcast, there will be space for meditative silence, so feel free to pause and take a few minutes to hold the space and sit with the words when you hear this bell.

### **Sound bell**

Please resume when you feel ready to continue. We will be imaginatively walking with Jesus's friends and disciples the hours between Jesus saying his last words on the cross and his friends laying him in the tomb.

Holy Saturday holds the space for unanswered questions, it calls out doubt, and gives voice to the only question we know Jesus asked God---My God, my God why have you forsaken me?

So here, ----- now, is a space for any of us who in the depths of our grief wants to call out to a God who appears absent, or at best, very far away.

### **Sound bell**

For the first disciples, Holy Saturday was a Sabbath filled with questions. Their understanding of leadership and Lordship got turned on its head. Questions of: *Who* is my God? *Where* is my God? Where is God in *my life*? come to the forefront once again in the silence of the Sabbath.

We all have our silent Sabbaths, when we find ourselves at the edge of a precipice, staring into an abyss of darkness, an abyss filled with feelings of personal deficit, betrayal, hopelessness, fear. Sometimes if silence is continuous, the precipice might even be inviting, we might start to wonder if the darkness of the abyss is more bearable than this unending silence.

At times like this, when we can find no words to form our thoughts into prayers, we fall back on well-known prayers. Like Our Father in Heaven hallowed be your name, or The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want.

We might say them over and over again, until we find our feet.

### **Sound bell**

Here on Holy Saturday, as we will be walk alongside the friends and disciples of Jesus shortly after his death, let us remember a few of the conversations Jesus had before he died. Jesus assures the sinner of being together with him in paradise, he has created safety for his mother in the future, he has said the words 'My God, my God why have you forsaken me?' and finally, his last words: It is finished. Jesus dies. The sky darkens, the temple veil gets ripped in half.

Our journey into Holy Saturday begins here. With those looking up at the cross where someone they believed to hold the meaning of eternity is dead. And death had a permanence that was irreversible. The hours following Christ's death on the cross were full of fear, questions, and meaninglessness.

What is it like to be in the presence of death? What are the kinds of things in our lives that have died and what are the things that we hold dear? Things we want to attend to, grieve, remember?

### Sound bell

As we reflect on that, let us imagine laying Jesus's cross on ground. Jesus does not need to be upright any more, connecting heaven and earth, asking God for our forgiveness. He can now be laid down to rest on the ground. Jesus's body is ready to become dust. The cross is pulled out and laid on the ground. This is the first time the friends and followers touch Jesus. They are in the presence of death, so the slightest hope anyone might still have of any miraculous saving is quietly dispelled. His friends need to work quickly. Sundown is approaching, and along with it, the day of Sabbath. This body on the cross must be in the tomb by nightfall.

So we need to extract nails from Jesus's hands and feet. Jesus's hands that were outstretched to enfold all of humanity's sins have nails driven through them. These nails will need to be pulled out before rigor mortis sets in. Myrrh and embalming spices are applied before wrapping the body in linen.

When we lay someone to rest, someone we've loved dearly, or perhaps someone we've struggled with, what kind of nails do we pull out? How do we remember the wounds in our journey together? How do we lay those wounds to rest? And along with that, what are the moments with this person that we hold dear, the parts we cherish? What do we honour?

While wrapping Jesus's body with Myrrh, aloe and embalming spices, what part of Jesus's life and death are we honouring?

Let us pause for a few minutes to think about that honouring, cherishing, and letting go

**Sound bell**

### **A reading from the gospel of St John 19:38-42**

Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

The wrapped body of the Messiah is placed in a tomb, someone else's death place, an unused tomb. Myrrh and aloes were brought by someone else. As Jesus maintained throughout his life that he owns nothing in this world, no money, or no permanent residence, so is he tended to in death, with the wealth of others love, owning nothing in the world, yet lacking nothing.

This is the point when the men would be seeing Jesus for the very last time as far as they know. The Jesus they shared meals with, witnessed healings with, laughed, cried, had fellowship with----this is the Jesus they are leaving behind in the tomb.

**Sound bell**

Nothing makes sense to anyone. Jesus was the Son of God, the promised deliverer of people. Jesus demonstrated the power of communicating with God and blessing people in the feeding miracles, healing miracles. People have been made whole, people have begun to remember who they worship, who they belong to----all because of Jesus. And yet, here they are, about to walk away from the wrapped body of Jesus.

The stone in front of the tomb gets rolled in place. This is it. It is finished. Jesus is buried. There will be no more miracles from the Son of God. Unfocused thoughts, along with the memory of Lazarus being raised from the dead jostles with so many others. Everyone is in shock, exhausted, fearful. But walk away they must.

Life will carry on. It must. Animals need tending to, children need to be fed, the sick need to be cared for. The laws of Moses remain foundational to living whether Jesus is alive or not.

In fact when our lives have been torn apart by an event like the death of a dear friend, mother, brother, sister, all we have left behind is to latch onto the safety of the good commandments that now means so much more. Jesus has redeemed the commandments. And on the first Sabbath after Jesus dies, this day we now call Holy Saturday, it was enough, just enough for people to exist without providing any explanations or answers.

### Sound bell

#### *A poem by Edward Shillito "Jesus of the Scars"*

If we have never sought, we seek Thee now;  
Thine eyes burn through the dark, our only stars;  
We must have sight of thorn-pricks on Thy brow,  
We must have Thee, O Jesus of the Scars.

The heavens frighten us; they are too calm;  
In all the universe we have no place.  
Our wounds are hurting us; where is the balm?  
Lord Jesus, by Thy Scars, we claim Thy grace.

If, when the doors are shut, Thou drawest near,  
Only reveal those hands, that side of Thine;  
We know to-day what wounds are, have no fear,  
Show us Thy Scars, we know the countersign.

The other gods were strong; but Thou wast weak;  
They rode, but Thou didst stumble to a throne;

But to our wounds only God's wounds can speak,  
And not a god has wounds, but Thou alone.

And not a God has wounds, but Thou alone. The power of our wounded Christ is in his vulnerability; we heard in the poem, only God's wounds can speak to ours. Sometimes those wounds are wounds of silence, of free fall, of loss of any kind of control.

Let us be comfortable to sit in the silence, be still in the presence of God, holding our doubts and unanswered questions to Him. Let us own the space where silence and questions coexist with God.

### Sound bell

With Jesus's friends we gather around a table. We remember the stone in front of the tomb. We also remember the person we buried, the one who gave hope to the grieving, the agonized and the dying. In his overwhelming compassion, we remember how he gathered the poor and broken-hearted, how he brought comfort and hope to God's people.

And somehow, in this remembering, we find strength in each other, and a deep joy in knowing Jesus as our friend.

Just for today, that is enough.

### Sound bell

#### *Let us pray:*

God of strength, as we leave our questions at the foot of the cross, guide us to take the next step.

You, God, understand grief. Give us strength we pray, to stumble thorough and fall into your arms.

God of Hope, as we feel overwhelmed by the hopelessness of our situation, remind us who you are, and what we mean to you.

**Amen.**