



April 11, 2020 • Holy Saturday

Job 14:1-14 • Psalm 31:1-4,15-16 • 1 Peter 4:1-8 • Matthew 27:57-66

Homily: The Rev. Emily Williams Guffey

Last Holy Saturday, in 2019, was my first Holy Saturday with you. That morning about twenty of us gathered in the chancel at 9:00 a.m. for this very same service, reading these very same readings and prayers that we are right now. Then, just about all of us gathered at the time went on to spend the rest of the morning—if not the whole rest of the day—getting ready: getting the sanctuary ready, getting our worship prepared for the next day, the big day.

The floral artists were brilliantly and quietly at work. Our sacristans on the Altar Guild were polishing brass and silver, deep cleaning the entire sanctuary, helping it to sparkle and shine to be at its very best. Ed, our organist, was practicing—which is just one of the most glorious sounds, one that I very much miss right now. Other musicians were coming in to practice together throughout the day.

I'm somebody who enjoys the anticipation of an event, the process toward something, sometimes even more than the result or the event itself. So, the quiet and joyful anticipation of Holy Saturday when we are able to worship in our own building is one of my very favorite days.

This year it is all so different, isn't it? I grieve along with all of us who are missing this day of quiet preparation in our beloved church. We do not get to enjoy the glory of the special music and of the flowers that many of us contribute in honor of somebody who has helped shape our lives, in memory of somebody that we have loved and lost. The sensory experience of getting to take in the smells and the sights and the sounds of Easter glory is something that we will profoundly miss this year.

So what is Holy Saturday? If the rest of the day will not be the one of preparation for a big glorious event, what do we do? How do we spend our time?

I think that this Holy Saturday, this day, may feel quite like the first one, when those who had loved Jesus had just lost him and were grieving profoundly. Their world had changed so remarkably beyond their imagining. This one in whom they saw so much

wisdom and hope, in whom they saw glimpses of God, whom they loved with all of their hearts...had just died.

For them everything came to a standstill. They questioned what they had believed. Their livelihoods in some cases were at risk because of the prejudice that they might receive for having been one of his followers. The world had changed so dramatically. And, it was also standing still. How much like today?

I want to share with you a description of Holy Saturday that one author wrote. Its words were speaking to me in particular to the crisis that we are in and what is the essence of Holy Saturday itself. This is from Matt Matthews. I love how poetically he puts this:

“Ash Wednesday ashes streak endlessly across a leaden sky, heated from that eruption of violence the day before. The world went raving mad and we tried, weakly, to put on the brakes but it was too late. Though the madness convulsed to a stop and the brakes finally held, it was too late. Our best efforts amount to little more than spitting against the wind. And now, of course, there is no wind. The mid-day storm howled and soaked us. But it passed quickly into the nothingness from which it came. Today is airless, still and unholy hot...We are bone-weary sad and more than a little afraid...Forever is how long this day seems to last. Forever and a day. We are stunned. We are hoarse. We have nothing left to cry. We pace and we pace.”¹

And today, we pace and we pace... around our homes, perhaps around our neighborhoods. We pace and we pace and we wonder...what is next? What is this world that we are in? What are we waiting for? What will the next day bring? What will the next year bring?

Who are we waiting for? And in whom can we put our trust?

¹ Matthews, William P. “Matt” Jr., “Holy Saturday: Psalm 31:1-4,15-16” in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year A, Volume 2*, pp. 310-312.