

## Holy Saturday 2016



Pilgrim Uniting Church, 12 Flinders St, Adelaide  
[www.pilgrim.org.au](http://www.pilgrim.org.au)

### Introduction

The day of the tomb serves as a borderland between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. As a borderland, it joins the two holiest days of the Christian calendar, giving each day the context and wonder of the other. As a borderland, it holds these days apart, allowing the profundity and magnitude of each be realised.

This space is for you to explore. It is self-guided, with the use of this resource. Please feel free to visit one or all of the stations. Linger with intent, and enter into the experience of what a station offers you - about grief and loss, about the 'in between' times, about the 'borderland', about the death of Jesus when all seems to have been lost. Be open to emotions, new insights, and the movement of God's Spirit.

In Luke's writings, the ancient practice of hospitality - the ancient custom of welcoming travellers or strangers into one's home and establishing relationships with them - is the prism through which Jesus' disciples view one another -and others - as valuable children of God. It was around tables and meals that conversation was shared, new insights gained, new perspectives gained that challenged old assumptions. After his death, mem-

ories of these moments would have been part of the process of grief and loss for Jesus' followers.

Tonight, cups are used as a symbol of that hospitality, and also invite you to engage with the time of grief and loss, in this 'in between' time of shadows, questions, doubts, fears. It invites you to enter into the experience of the disciples and followers of Jesus. It invites you to venture deeper into the arena of your own faith, in the dark times, in the 'in between times' when the easy answers no longer are enough. It invites you to be present - present to your own feelings, and present to God's Spirit weaving in, through and between our lives.

In each space there is a page inviting reflections. Feel free to take one and add your own thoughts and images to what others have offered. There are clipboard folders at the entrance you can use, and pens.

You may also find the written reflections in this resource helpful to meditate upon, or to take them away for further contemplation.

### **Remembering the biblical story and the Christian tradition**

On Holy Saturday, the lectionary presents us with a choice of Gospel readings. Both readings describe the burial of Christ. Matthew's version tells us that Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" (the mother of James and Joseph) were present, sitting opposite the tomb as Joseph of Arimathea laid Jesus in the tomb, rolled a stone across its entrance, and walked away. In John's Gospel, Nicodemus helps Joseph of Arimathea with Jesus' burial, bringing a hundred pounds (45 kgs!) of myrrh and aloes that he and Joseph use as they wrap Jesus in his shroud and lay him in the tomb. Nicodemus, the man who questioned Jesus about the womb, now tends his body at the tomb.

Though the Sabbath soon descended after Jesus was laid in the tomb, some traditions hold that Jesus did not rest on this day. The Apostles' Creed speaks about "crucified, dead, and buried", and, "He descended into hell" (or "He descended to the dead"). The Descent embodies the idea that the one who fully entered our humanity on earth and thereby freed us was able also to enter even into hell and release those in bondage there.

Whatever Christ was up to (or down to) on Holy Saturday, for his followers it was a day of sorrow and bewilderment. Bereft of the one around whom they had shaped their lives, they had to choose whether they would isolate themselves in their sorrow and fear, or whether they would remain together and wait for a way to present itself. Holy Saturday is not a day for answers. It is a threshold day, a day that lies between, and so resists any easy certainty. It is a day of waiting, of remembering to breathe, of willing ourselves to turn to one another when grief lays hold of us. It is a day to open ourselves to the one who goes into the places of deepest pain and darkest fear, in order to bring us out.

What stirs within you on this holy, in-between day?

*(Jan Richardson)*

Holy Saturday reminds me that one has to learn how to be Christian. When I first came to Christian faith, the day meant nothing to me. It was the blank day between the high dramas of Good Friday and Easter, the day when nothing happened. Jesus was dead and buried. Everyone had gone home to get some rest. In the morning he would rise triumphant from the grave but meanwhile there was nothing to do. It seemed rude to go shopping, or to check the movie listings. So I puttered the day away, rattling around the house doing nothing much while the clock ticked toward Easter. Holy Saturday was a

placeholder, an empty set of parentheses, a waiting room for a train that would not come until morning.

Later, when I became a priest, Holy Saturday was the day when members of the congregation came to the church for private confession. My only job was to listen, pronouncing some of the sweetest words in the prayer book at the end: “Now there is rejoicing in heaven; for you were lost, and are found; you were dead, and are now alive in Christ Jesus our Lord. Go in peace. The Lord has put away all your sins.” After that I waited in the church for the next person to come. Sometimes I lay down on a pew, which was how I began to imagine Jesus lying on a stone ledge in the dark. I had been to Jerusalem, so I knew how tombs looked in those days: low holes in rock walls, with narrow bunks inside to hold the dead bodies until the flesh on them was gone and the bones could be gathered up for safe-keeping.

That was where Jesus spent Holy Saturday: in a dark hole in the ground, doing absolutely nothing. It was the Sabbath, after all. His friends had worked hard to make sure he was laid to rest before the sun went down. Then they went home to rest too, because that was what they did on Saturdays. They rested in the presence of the Maker of All Life and waited to see what would happen next.

Though Christians speak of “witnesses to the resurrection,” there were no witnesses. Whatever happened to Jesus between Saturday and Sunday, it happened in the dark, with the smell of damp stone and dug earth in the air. It happened where no one but him could talk about it later, and he did not talk about it - at least not so anyone could explain it to anyone else.

That is what Holy Saturday has taught me about being Christian. Between the great dramas of life, there is almost always a time of empty waiting - with nothing to do. If you are willing to rest in this Sabbath, where you cannot see your hand in front of your face and none of your self-protective labours can do you one bit of good, then you may come as close to the Christ as you will ever get – there in that quiet cave where you wait to see how the Maker of All Life will choose to come to you in the dark.

*(Barbara Brown Taylor)*

O God, intimately within and infinitely beyond,  
grow in my heart a watchful and holy attention,  
present whether I be in wordless stillness or fevered striving,  
that I may more likely discern those thin moments  
touching upon my life and the lives of others,  
a breaking through in the very fabric of your created world,  
bearing witness to the profound graciousness of your holy love.  
And may the wonder of these signs point me forward,  
in humility, to greater depths of love for you  
and clearer visions of who I am and who I am becoming. *(c) Stillpoint Spirituality Centre*

IN THE biblical descriptions of the Easter event, the story moves straight from Good Friday to Easter Sunday. An entire day of grief, devastation and fear lies unspoken between the end of one paragraph, where Jesus is buried, and the beginning of the next, his resurrection two days later. Perhaps it was simply that there were no words to do justice to the empty day in the middle. We can only imagine that, for the followers of Jesus, it must have been the emptiest, most shattering experience they could ever encounter – a metaphorical hell. If any day in the Christian calendar resonates with the fear, sadness and desperation that so much of the world lives with at every moment, it has to be Easter Saturday.

British guerilla graffiti artist Banksy visited the segregation wall that separates Palestine from Israel a few years ago. In his typically subversive style, he stencilled images on to

the grey concrete wall: startling vistas of tropical islands, pictures of plush armchairs seated by windows that overlooked snow-capped mountains, a silhouette of a girl holding a bunch of balloons that were carrying her to freedom above the wall. He painted an alternative world of hope and liberation on to the concrete reality of conflict and despair. As he was working, an old Palestinian man approached him, and they had this conversation:

Old man: "You paint the wall, you make it look beautiful."

Banksy: "Thanks."

Old Man: "We don't want it to be beautiful. We hate this wall, go home."

Our human inclination, when we come face to face with despair on a personal or global scale, is to paint over it with easy answers, and to think that because we can only see the paint, the concrete reality behind it no longer exists. It's almost impossible to sit in the great chasm of the world's Easter Saturday and not fill it with glib promises and wishful thinking, to layer a resurrection story on top of it. We depend on the promise of a happy ending, but when we realise that there are some stories for which there is no ending, our hope crumbles.

"Hope begins in the dark," says author Anne Lamott. That's the miracle that Christians believe was made real through the resurrection, and a truth that has been proven through history. We can't talk ourselves or anyone else into having hope. We get there only by turning up in the darkness and doing the right thing. By choosing and honouring justice and love every time, hope has a chance to be born.

There are a few words that should always be accompanied by official warnings, if only because their misuse causes so much damage. Love is one of them, hope another. But if we are going to vote for hope, we have to be willing to do more than simply paint pictures onto concrete walls. The only way the world can survive this Easter Saturday is if we have the courage and faith it takes to wait with those who are living in hell, even if there is no certainty that they or we will survive. It seems even God knows that there is no other way.

*(Cheryl Lawrie, published in The Age 2008)*

### Station 1: smashed cup

Grief is like a shattering of hopes.....



I see the disciples on Holy Saturday as heartbroken, confused, and defeated. They had heard Jesus say that he would be resurrected but now that promise seemed like false hope and empty naiveté. Their saviour changed them, helped them see a new way, but now it seems like that's all that this saviour would do. Now he is dead and Rome is suspicious of those who gathered around Jesus, so the best chance to survive and not suffer Jesus' fate is to go back to life as they knew it before.

For those of us who know the end of the story it is easy to hold the tension of Holy Saturday. But over two thousand years ago, followers of Jesus did not know, the world did not know, creation longing, aching for salvation yet salvation now seemed farther away than ever.

We too go back to our old ways. Maybe we have tried to start again so many times that we feel defeated, maybe life has thrown a few twists that we did not expect, maybe we are just tired of trying again.

This Holy Saturday hold still . . . look around . . . know that there are many who get it, who have been hopeless, who are afraid, who think that maybe all these years of following Jesus have been for naught.

This Holy Saturday hold still . . . look around . . . creation too is longing with you! Pay attention for morning is coming . . . (c) *spiritstirrer.org*

### Station 2: Cracked

In the midst of living, I can almost go on as if nothing has changed. Only those who choose to stop and notice will really see the crack. But the long scar remains part of the fabric of life.....



**Station 3: tipped over, poured out....**

It seems as if life itself has been poured out....the vitality, the joy....and despair that it can never be gathered up again....



**Station 4: cup without handles**

From one angle, it would seem as if everything is the way it should be. But then I notice the usual ways of doing things don't work anymore. How can I learn to do things in a new way, to make do with a diminished way of being? Yet it's all I have in this moment....



### **Station 5: cup of tears, cup of sorrows**

This art piece, Gethsemane, by Israeli-Canadian sculptor Rick Wienecke, depicts Jesus struggling with the cup of sorrows. He himself is poured out over a large stone. His hands are holding the cup but not fully. He is struggling over the decision of doing the will of the Father or his own. In deciding to do the will of the Father the cup is full, it is the beginning of the crucifixion.



The whole world turned grey for One  
who found himself without friend or helper,  
faced with drinking a cup he'd prayed  
would be turned away from him,  
knowing that life was about to be drained out of him. *(c) Stillpoint Spirituality Centre*

*What is your cup of tears, your cup of sorrows?*

### **Station 6: the emptiness**

Grief may be experienced as emptiness, when life seems robbed of joy, robbed of colour.....



### Station 7: Poured out

Grief can seem as if life itself has been poured out.....aching days of emptiness.....



### Station 8: remembering the meal

Take your place at the table, with the bread and the cup. Jesus gave new meaning to the common elements of bread, and wine. He said he would be present whenever the bread was broken, whenever the cup was lifted.



We find a place at the table.....

'It would not have been God's table  
if they hadn't all been gathered around it:  
the betrayer and the friend  
the power-hungry and the justice seeker  
the faithful and the fickle'. (c) Cheryl Lawrie

It is a meal, a re-membrance, a gathering. But it is the type of gathering and who it is that gathers that begins to give us clues, strong clues, as to the identity of this meeting, the reason for why it has been given for us to receive. It is people that gather, real people, who have lived real lives, saints and sinners, one and the same. It is fitting that this becomes the beginning of a tragedy that becomes an epic drama of cosmic dimensions. God made human gathering with people in need of restoration, in



need of hope. Like at many other meals, stories are shared and actions speak louder than words. The host becomes the meal, the master becomes the servant, the guests are called to follow the master's lead, the filled called to share what will soon be out poured for all the world.

God's Table becomes the perpetual re-ordering of our lives towards God-likeness. Those who gather are those who know that they needed most. So we receive and receive so that we can give and give, so that we can have the strength to carry on through the trials, disappointment, and surprises of the world. Love enacted in our outpouring, in our braking, in our giving.

We gather to receive so that in the midst of darkness, the light of love can shine for the life of the world. May we hear the call to gather, whoever we are, may we hear the call to walk the way of love, may we hear the call to die so that we can live again!

*(c) spiritstirrer.org*

*If you wish, take a piece of the bread, and a sip from the chalice. Be present to this sacred moment, when Jesus says he will be present, beyond the bonds of death, beyond the limitations of space and time.*

**Taken, blessed, broken, given** *(words of Henri Nouwen)*

O Bread of Life, feed our hungry souls

Come satisfy the emptiness we know

Take and bless us,

Break and give away

This Bread of Life

This Bread of Life *(words by Kathy Douglass)*

### **We take our leave**

We go out to wait,

we watch for the hope that defies despair,

the life that defies death,

the beginning that defies the end.

While we wait,

while darkness covers the land of faith,

remember that no matter how abandoned we may feel

we are not alone.

God has not and will not abandon us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

<http://worshipofferings.blogspot.ca/>

### **Blessing for Holy Saturday**

This blessing can wait as long as you can.

Longer.

This blessing began eons ago and knows the art of enduring.

This blessing has passed through ages and generations,

witnessed the turning of centuries,

weathered the spiralling of history.

This blessing is in no rush.

This blessing will plant itself by your door.

This blessing will keep vigil and chant prayers.

This blessing will bide its sweet time

until it hears the beginning of breath,

the stirring of limbs,

the stretching, reaching, rising  
of what had lain dead within you  
and is ready to return. (c) Jan Richardson

### **The Time of the Cups**

I have drunk the cup of Elijah - His time is come and gone  
And I want to know if truth will penetrate my soul  
As the truth of His being has intensified my longing.

I have drunk the cup of our last meal - Dark and sweet was the wine  
He fed us with affliction, he slaked our thirst with abandonment  
Bitter was the betrayal of one who loved Him.  
His skin purpled with rage as he bent over to kiss.

I have drunk the cup in the garden - it tasted of gall  
A deep dark drought. The will of God!  
It tasted of ashes - Harsh medicine  
For a creation overwhelmed with brokenness.

I have drunk the cup of the cross - the blood and tears  
Misery and suffering streamed out and  
Ran down the rough wood. I gathered  
It in the cup of my flesh as the blood stained my hands.

I have drunk the cup of sorrows - the cup weightless  
Strange was its' colour and  
Filled with vapour that evanesced into a melancholy nothingness  
It reeked with a miasma of the grave.

For three days I drank nothing - for three days it were as if I were dead  
It was a fast, yet the time passed slowly  
Never had a Sabbath existed with such conflicting tensions.

(c) Theresa Coleman

We stand looking into the unknown darkness  
with our doubts and questions and pain and fears  
wondering how to step forward.....