**Holy Saturday 2017**

Image: Joseph Mallord William Turner, Shade and Darkness

Original at
<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-shade-and-darkness-the-evening-of-the-deluge-n00531>

**Pilgrim Uniting Church, 12 Flinders St, Adelaide**

**www.pilgrim.org.au**

**Introduction**

We are here

- somewhere between Good Friday and Easter Sunday.
Holy Saturday is the between time
- the time between death and resurrection,
between what has gone and what is to come,
between despair and hope,
between the seed planted and the seed springing up.

It is 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.

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.

So let us make time for gathering thoughts and planning action,
a time for preparation,
and also a time of rest, a time for healing,
a time for acceptance,

a time for living with loss and trauma.

In the gospel stories the women gather their ointments,
build up their courage and prepare for dawn action.
The men on the other hand retreat in silence,
consumed by 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?

Holy Saturday –
A time for the seeds of hope and love,
for the seeds of courageous action to germinate.

‘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)*

Much of our lives are spent in Holy Saturday places but we spend so much energy resisting, longing for resolution and closure. Our practice this day is to really enter into the liminal zone, to be present to it with every cell of our being. Holy Saturday lets us sit with all of the paradoxes of life. Bring yourself as fully present as you can to the discomfort of the experience. Rest in the space of waiting and unknowing and resist trying to come up with neat answers or resolutions. Imagine yourself on a wild border or standing on a threshold, knowing that you cannot fully embrace what is on the other side until you have let this place shape and form your heart. When you notice your attention drifting or your mind starting to analyze, return to your breath and the present moment. Allow yourself to feel whatever arises in this space. Honour the mystery.
*Christine Valters Paintner*

You are invited to engage with the time of grief and loss, in this ‘in between’ time of shadows, questions, doubts, fears. You are invited to enter into the experience of the disciples and followers of Jesus, and bring our own experiences to mind. You are invited 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. You are invited to be present - present to your own feelings, and present to God’s Spirit weaving in, through and between our lives.

This space is for you to explore. It is self-guided, with the use of this resource. The eight stations scattered around the church use paper to prompt reflection. Please feel free to visit one or all of the stations. Linger with intent, and enter into the experience. Be open to emotions, new insights, and the movement of God’s Spirit.

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

In the interplay of silence, scripture, and journalling, consider the following as questions for spiritual reflection:

 • What is open and uncertain in my life?

 • Where am I grieving? What losses am I living with?

 • What are my "what next" questions?

 • How am I living with uncertainty?

 • Where am I experiencing God in the interim time?

Take time to pray your uncertainties, lifting them up to God for comfort and guidance, knowing God is with us in the wilderness and the ‘space in between’.

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. *Stillpoint Spirituality Centre*

Don't surrender your loneliness so quickly.
Let it cut more deep.
Let it ferment and season you as few human
Or even divine ingredients can.
Something missing in my heart tonight
Has made my eyes so soft,
My voice so tender,
My need of God
Absolutely clear. *Hafiz*

Before we rush to resurrection we must dwell fully in the space of unknowing, of holding death and life in tension with each other, to experience that liminal place so that we become familiar with its landscape and one day might accompany others who find themselves there and similarly disoriented. We must be fully present to both the starkness of Friday and to the Saturday space between, before we can really experience the resurrection. We must know the terrible experience of loss wrought again and again in our world so that when the promise of new life dawns we can let it enter into us fully in the space carved by loss. As the great poet of Hafiz reminds us, we must let our loneliness "cut more deep" and "season" us, so that we are reminded of our absolute dependence on the Source of all. *Christine Valters Paintner*

For me, Holy Saturday evokes much about the human condition—the ways we are called to let go of things or people, identities or securities and then wonder what will rise up out of the ashes of our lives. The suffering that we experience because of pain or grief or great sorrow and we don't know if we will ever grasp joy again. Much of our lives rest in that space between loss and hope. Our lives are full of Holy Saturday experiences. *Christine Valters Paintner*

**A Blessing for Holy Saturday**

I have no cause to linger beside this place of death

no reason to keep vigil where life has left

and yet I cannot go,

cannot bring myself to cleave myself from here

can only pray that this waiting

might yet be a blessing

and this grieving yet a blessing

and this stone yet a blessing

and this silence yet a blessing still. *Jan Richardson*

To me, Holy Saturday is one of most important moments of Holy Week. Sure, I love the Palm Sunday Hosannas and rejoice each Easter with the emergence of Resurrection Life. But Holy Saturday speaks most directly to the daily reality of our lives. After the shock of death or words that bring despair (such as "cancer," "divorce," "terminal," "sorry, but you’re position is being made redundant"), we have to begin living with the "what next?" as we enter the void of unknowing. Most of us live, from time to time, in Holy Saturday. We experience the jubilation of Easter and the stark pain of Good Friday, but those are immediate and momentary. Holy Saturday is the time in between death and resurrection, fear and hope, pain and comfort. Holy Saturday is the valley of grief and uncertainty - for us as much for Jesus' first disciples. Like the women and men on that first Holy Saturday, I live with an uncertain future. *Bruce Epperly*

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*

**new section**

**Grief and Memory - Contemplation with Paper**

**Station 1. Memories of the Last Supper**

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. *Stillpoint Spirituality Centre*

…and he said, “This is my body…”.

…now his body is wrapped up and in a cold tomb…

Take one of the rolls and remember the life of Jesus.

 As you wrap it up in a sheet of paper, feel the grief of those who tended to his body.

Take the wrapped bread home with you.

Make a sacred time to “eat this in remembrance of me” and contemplate the empty sheet as you rise, Easter Sunday.

**Station 2. Bookmark**

Spend some time in contemplation about ‘hope’, and write some words or draw some images to remind you of what enables you to cradle hope in the midst of uncertainty and disappointment.

**Station 3. Tears and Tearing**

Tears and tearing are not just related words; in some cultures, grief is expressed by the tearing of cloth, even one’s clothes.

Express grief by ripping a sheet of paper and reflect on your action

Or

Contemplate grief by the slow tearing of a sheet of paper.

Pray for resolution and healing as you place the torn pieces in the container.

**Station 5. Chain of Resilience**



When the early Christians were suffering persecution and suffering, the Apostle Peter wrote two letters to them about dealing with it.

Do your best to add goodness to your faith; to your goodness add knowledge; to your knowledge add self-control; to your self-control add endurance; to your endurance add godliness; to your godliness add brotherly and sisterly affection; and to your affection add love. These are the qualities you need, and if you have them in abundance, they will make you active and effective in your knowledge of Jesus.
2 Peter 5-8

Write these qualities and any others that occur to you, one on each strip of paper. Contemplate each as you staple the strips into connected circles to make a paper chain.

The list Peter suggests is a progression of qualities that take us from faith to love. Love is the goal. Where might you be stuck in that progressio**n?**

**Station 6 The colours of darkness**

Even in the midst of the dark night of the soul, there are glimpses of colour.

Even when our days are veiled with grey, there are glimpses of colour.

Spend some time in contemplation as you consider the ‘chromotography’ and the way the colours have bled from the black colour.

What does this invite of you?

**Station 6. Crushed Hopes**

I see the disciples on Holy Saturday as heartbroken, confused, and defeated. 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. 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 . . . *spiritstirrer.org*

Write on a sheet of paper the memories of unresolved hope you have had in your life.

When you are satisfied that you have named those that come to mind, crumple the paper into a small ball.

How does it feel to have your hopes dashed?

Reflect on those hopes that have been crushed. Were they realistic?

Uncrumple and flatten out the paper. Which hopes do you still hold?

**Station 7. Patterns of Meaning**

At times, grief can feel like pieces being cut out of our soul, like we are being diminished.

Follow the instructions you will find on the table to complete a pattern, and then open to reveal the finished product. What might it say about meaning, and patterns, and being able to look back on the hard times with some sense of peace. When has this happened to you. And what can you take forward into the future as ways of managing the inevitable disappointments, setbacks and hard times?

**Station 8 Meditation on Lifted Spirit**

It seems as if life itself has been dragged down….the vitality, the joy….and you carry the despair that it can never be lifted up again…..

Wait by the covered pulpit until the booth is free.

Meditate on the image in the pulpit.

What lifts your spirit?

Who holds the strings?

Who do you need to thank?

**Praying in the Spirit of Easter Saturday**

Lord of Easter,

God of all times,

We pray in the Spirit of Easter Saturday.
We pray in this liminal time,
This in in-between time,
The place of paralysis in the midst of confusion,
The bit or gap where the chasm of despair or hopelessness seems sometimes all too close.
We pray for those who are in-between.
For those who have to wait,
Mourners,
The grieving,
Refugees,
For those who walk in the shadow of death,
For those waiting for results or treatment,
Those between employment,
Those between opposing powers.
For those for whom the promise of paradise seems but a mirage or a place beyond the horizon of their hope.

Lord of Easter,

You have walked by this way before us.

For us the Easter story moves ahead towards resolution and resurrection,
but for many the reality of the future is unclear and uncertain,
just as it was for your disciples and followers that Easter Saturday.

Be with us, Christ, and all those caught in the vortex of waiting.

Carry all beyond our fear and despair to hope.

Lift us all and strengthen us when the weight of uncertainty presses down upon us.

Sustain us when we feel trapped by circumstance.

Lord of Easter,

God of all times,

We pray in the Spirit of Easter Saturday.

Comfort and uphold us all.

Enfold us in your love, that we may bear the angst is waiting.

Transform us into survivors.

Walk with us into tomorrow.

Walk us into how and healing.

Bring us into resurrection.

This we ask of you.

Amen.
(Jon Humphries)

**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. *Jan Richardson*

We stand looking into the unknown darkness

with our doubts and questions and pain and fears

wondering how to step forward……