

Sermon Easter Vigil 2022

Christ Reveals Himself to Us

Jesus is dead. I still can't believe it. Just a few days earlier we were marching in a parade with palm branches while people shouted hosanna at Jesus' arrival. What happened? How did such a promising beginning to this week end so tragically? I really thought Jesus was the Messiah, the one, who was going to set us free from this brutal Empire.

My heart is hurting so much from this sadness. This loss. I don't know how we can move forward with Jesus' movement without Jesus here with us. What if I am next? I can't imagine suffering like Jesus did.

My hope is gone. The spark inside me has burnt out. I just want to curl up in a little ball, and waste away. This world has just become a lot darker this day.

Today, is what the church calls Holy Saturday. A day where we reflect on the grief that those who followed Jesus must have felt after Jesus' crucifixion. Sadness, confusion, despair towards a movement that looks all but dead.

Similar, to how the Israelites feel, standing on the beaches of the Red Sea, watching, as the Egyptian army bears down on them.

Holy Saturday is often forgotten in the church. We grieve a little on Good Friday, and then get ready to celebrate on Easter Sunday. We don't pay much attention to Holy Saturday, and yet, this day is more than a reality to the disciples who lived it. This day is symbolic for those periods in our life where we experience grief. I like to call them the Holy Saturdays of our lives (**Image**: An hour glass).

For example, dealing with the grief and uncertainty that comes with a cancer diagnosis. Or dealing with the grief and uncertainty that comes with losing or retiring from a career. Or dealing with the grief and uncertainty that comes when a relationship you are in breaks up. Or dealing with the grief and uncertainty that comes when turning on your device, and watching the images we see of Ukraine (**Image**). Afraid that this war will become a global war.

Like the disciples, we can deal with a heap of emotions that come when we find ourselves standing in the Holy Saturdays of our lives. The despair that comes when we struggle to see God's healing and redemption happening in our lives. The sadness that comes with the loss of what we have known. The confusion that comes when we find ourselves suddenly standing on sand instead of solid ground.

Holy Saturdays are not foreign to us. Sometimes we try to ignore these days. Sometimes we try to hide on these days. But eventually the grief overwhelms us, and we are forced to deal with it.

In our gospel this evening, John gives us a very well thought out description of the grief Mary Magdalene feels as she processes Jesus' crucifixion. Remember unlike the majority of disciples, Mary stood at the foot of the cross, watching Jesus suffer.

When Mary arrives at the tomb, she sees the rock slipped away. What was supposed to be an opportunity to come and pay her respects, as well as, finish a burial ritual, has turned into a re - traumatization of the loss she has experienced.

Mary is concerned that someone has taken Jesus' body. After a short interlude where Peter and the unknown disciple come and witness the empty tomb, Mary is left alone. Weeping.

When she peers in, she sees two angels there, ready to comfort her with the good news that Jesus has risen. Unfortunately, Mary is so overwhelmed with her grief that she is unable to hear what the angels have to say.

Then Jesus appears to Mary. Again, Mary's tears are rushing down her face so much so that she can't see Jesus. She assumes he is the gardener, and again pleads for the return of Jesus' body. It was very common in those days for people to steal bodies from their tombs.

When Jesus sees how consumed Mary is by her grief, he calls out compassionately, Mary. In this moment, Mary is able to see Jesus.

Suddenly, Mary's grief is no longer paralyzing her from seeing the risen Christ. Mary is empowered to go to the others to tell them what she has seen.

The spark is back. The hope in Jesus' movement is reborn (**Image**).

What Mary, the disciples, and all those who have chosen to follow Jesus have found is that in the midst of the Holy Saturdays of our Lives the risen Christ reveals himself to us. Transforming our despair into hope. Transforming our sadness into joy. Transforming our confusion into belief.

Like what the Israelites find when God liberates them from Egypt. When Moses strikes the Red Sea. Parting the waters. Giving God's people a safe passage to the Promised Land.

We see that even though we experience grief in our lifetime, we also, experience the resurrection. We experience God's healing, redemption, and new life (**Image**).

And it is in this witness of the risen Christ that we continue to hope in God's healing, redemption, and new life. Even as we witness the current darkness our world is experiencing.

Let us pray, loving God, help us see your risen Son in the midst of our grief. Help us believe in your resurrection promise. Heal us. Redeem us. And give us new life. **Amen.**

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