

April 11, 2020 Daily Devotional

Today's scripture reading from our Lenten devotional is from Mark 15:33-46:

"33When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 34At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' 35When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, 'Listen, he is calling for Elijah.' 36And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.' 37Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. 38And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. 39Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was God's Son!' 40There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. 41These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem. 42When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, 43Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 44Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. 45When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. 46Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb."

I usually think of resurrection as something that just happens. But in her reflection on this passage, Rev. Rae Chen Huang challenges my thinking and says: "Resurrection is a process. Resurrection is something we plan and prepare for. Resurrection is something we must create and build. Resurrection is something that happens one step at a time. Holy Saturday is the beginning of resurrection."

Today I'm thinking that part of our planning and preparing for resurrection is active opposition to discrimination, prejudice, and hate. We Christians have some owning up to do in this regard. For example, a lot of damage has been done by misuse of the Good Friday readings from the gospel of John, which several times reference and cast blame on "the Jews." As I've

preached before, throughout history texts like these have been distorted and used to justify anti-Semitic thought and acts. Understanding the context in which the scriptures were written is critical: John's gospel was written at a time at least 40 years after the death of Jesus, and later conflicts likely shaped the gospel writer's characterization of the earlier events around Jesus' death. We should read these as references to the opponents of Jesus, not to the Jewish people; the disciples and followers of Jesus, just like Jesus, of course, were Jews. (Scholars suggest that a more contextual translation might be to say "the authorities.") But nevertheless, we need to confront and wrestle honestly with the way our writings suggest these judgments. As Christians, we are responsible for being clear that any use of the Gospel by Christians to justify anti-Semitism is a perversion of who Jesus was and what he taught.

We're likewise responsible in this moment for opposing the bigotry that implies any nationality is responsible for the coronavirus. We're responsible for opposing the differential treatment in health care that too often is based on race or socioeconomic status. We're responsible for opposing systems that make people of color afraid of wearing protective masks in public.

We're responsible for the church's failure to care for people impacted by past health epidemics because of who they loved.

Rev. Rae Chen Huang has provoked me to ponder resurrection as "something we must create and build." May this Holy Saturday also be "the beginning of resurrection" for the Church and its bold witness.

Let us share in the prayer from our devotional:

"Ever-loving God, most days we are living in a season of Holy Saturday. Our Messiah has died, and like Jesus, we feel like we've been forsaken, and we don't know what's next. Remind us that resurrection happens one step at a time. Inspire us to join as co-creators in building the beloved community. Empower us to prepare for resurrection; not only for ourselves, but so that all may experience new life. Amen."