

Saturday

After the marathon of yesterday's devotional, you'll be happy to know that today's is relatively short! Today is the Saturday after Jesus' death, and the only thing written in the gospels about this day is found in Matthew 27:62-66. The chief priests and Pharisees likely spent Friday evening celebrating that they had finally achieved their goal. After years of plotting, they had finally killed Jesus. But after their celebrating, doubts must have crept into their minds overnight. They had heard Jesus say that he would be raised from the dead after three days. What if a Jesus-follower came and stole the body of Jesus and claimed that he had risen? The people would keep believing in him, and that would be almost as bad as not killing Jesus at all!

So, on Saturday, the chief priests and Pharisees go back to see Pilate. They tell him about their concerns of the possibility of a grave robbery, and ask Pilate to secure Jesus' tomb. Pilate agrees to their request, and posts a guard in front of the tomb, and has them put a seal on the stone that would indicate if anyone tried rolled the stone away and put it back sneakily. Did this ease the minds of the chief priests and Pharisees, or did they continue to worry? We aren't told. But, I think that we can safely assume from their actions on Saturday, that they were waiting- waiting eagerly, or waiting with a sense of dread, for the third day from Jesus' death to be over. Then they could rest easy that Jesus's claims were false.

What I find even more intriguing, is to think about what this day of waiting was like for the disciples. If we read ahead to Sunday, the reactions of the women and the disciples to finding the empty tomb show us that none of them were counting the days, or expecting Jesus to be raised back to life. This means that Saturday was not a day spent in eager anticipation of seeing Jesus again, but rather, a day of grief, sorrow, and questioning. A day of wondering if Jesus was actually the Messiah after all? A day of wondering if all the miracles and healings Jesus did were just an odd dream they were waking up from? After all, if he could raise Lazarus from the dead, why couldn't he have saved himself from his own death? "Why, God?" Would have been the question in all their minds, all day long.

They must have also been exhausted, in body, mind, and soul. They had experienced emotional whiplash from Jesus' celebrated entry last Sunday and the admiring crowds during the week of Jesus teaching at the temple, to the sadness of Judas' betrayal, and haunting memories of Jesus' beatings and death. Even worse, they were still frightened by the sudden turn of events, and we read that they went into hiding. Jesus had been confirmed dead by the soldiers, and buried in a stone tomb. There was no other option than to believe the cold, hard reality- that Jesus was dead. They had gone from a major high to an incredible low, and in their low, there is no Jesus present to comfort them. Did they remember Jesus' words and prayers from Thursday night?

Did they have any memory of Jesus saying he would be raised on the third day? Or did the trauma of the day make it hard to remember anything? We just aren't told.

Now that we have access to online bible tools, it is fairly easy to search the gospels for the words, "three days," or "on the third day." In doing so, I found that Matthew, Mark, and Luke, each gospel mentions Jesus telling his disciples that he would die and be raised to life on the third day, on three separate occasions. Jesus was very clear on these three occasions, but also, he even told them that a story from hundreds of years ago, that mentioned "three days," was pointing to himself. Matthew tells us that the story of Jonah foretold Jesus' death and resurrection. The teachers and Pharisees had asked Jesus to show them a "sign," or a miracle. Jesus could see through their false motives, and said he would only show them the sign of Jonah. Jesus said, *"For as Jonah was in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth"* (Matthew 12:40).

When Jesus told the Pharisees that Jonah's 3 days in the belly of a whale was pointing to him, he was giving us a hint to look at other places where significant events happened on "the third day." A quick search through the Old Testament for "third day" points out that the day Abraham was asked to sacrifice Isaac, but God saved Isaac, was the "third day." Moses went up on the mountain of Sinai, and God came down in sight of all the people on the "third day." Many battles were won on the "third day." Queen Esther bravely saved the nation of Israel on the "third day." Most compelling, are these verses from Hosea, predicting the rescue of Israel from captivity in Babylon:

"Come, let us return to the Lord; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up. After two days, he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up" (Hosea 6:1-2).

It's like all through history, God is building the suspense that something incredible will happen on the "third day." Why the disciples didn't catch on to all the hints from the Old Testament, and Jesus' three statements, is anyone's guess. It could be that God even purposefully hid this understanding from them until the right time. But they certainly did not have the benefit of hindsight, like we do, until they saw the risen Jesus, and he explained all these prophecies to them.

But for now, the disciples must wait for understanding. How often do we find ourselves in situations where we don't understand what God is doing? I know this happens in my life more often than I wish it did. The disciples did wait faithfully through those long hours between Friday afternoon and Sunday morning. Though they may have asked many questions, none of them walked away from God completely. No one else ended their life, like Judas. And perhaps this is the encouragement we can take from this Saturday. God does not always seem to work

in ways that make sense to us, and he often makes us wait longer than we would like for answers. But God doesn't mind us asking the hard questions. Tragedies, loss, illness, poverty, and sadness are all still common experiences, even after we become followers of Jesus. God has an uncanny way of using our suffering for good. It doesn't mean the suffering ends, or that tragic events are reversed. The way God uses suffering for good is to infuse it with meaning and purpose, and this is what is happening in the hearts of the disciples today.

John tells us that Jesus told the disciples with full honesty, *"In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world"* (John 16:33).

Peter, who was suffering today in the knowledge that he had betrayed Jesus and never had a chance to make things right with him, really seems to have developed a deep understanding of suffering when he writes his New Testament letter many years later. On the other side of this sorrowful day, Peter writes with a joy that just can't be contained. Let's end today's devotional with Peter's words, full of wisdom and strength that grew out of the suffering he endured.

There is life and hope, in the midst of, and on the other side of suffering. We'll see the reason we can be sure of that hope tomorrow. Today, let's ask God to use our suffering for the same sort of good that Peter sees here, to breathe purpose into it, and strengthen us in ways we would never have been strengthened without that suffering.

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1 Peter 1:3-7).

Extra Reading: Matthew 27: 62-66, Matthew 12: 38-40, Genesis 22: 1-19, Exodus 19