

“Hole –ly” Saturday

Let’s live today with the disciples. For unlike Matthew’s church with whom we have been reading the Gospel this year and unlike us who know what tomorrow brings, this day, this Saturday was very different for them.

Yesterday, after Jesus died, Joseph and Nicodemus took his body down from the Cross, wrapped it in linen, and laid it in Joseph’s tomb. They had to hurry. Sunset was coming – there was no daylight savings time – and the Sabbath would begin – no work could be done – and burials are hard work.

The disciples and the women scatter. Some, probably the women, go to Bethany – to the home of Mary and Martha and Lazarus. The disciples most likely return to the room where they ate supper - was it only on Thursday? It feels like a lifetime ago.

Because it’s the Sabbath, no one can do anything – no fire can be lit, no cooking can be done, no one can take a walk, go shopping. Because they are hiding from the Romans and the Temple police, mourning - weeping,

and lamentation – is impossible – the sounds will draw unwanted attention – there is no tearing of garments, no ashes on heads. Everyone is hunkered down, keeping quiet. They spend this day in fear and trembling, in sorrow or in shame.

The women talk quietly. They plan for the morning when they can revisit the tomb and complete the burial, anointing the body and rewrapping it, taking their time, not acting in haste. Then they will prepare the meal of consolation, the eggs and lentils, and together with the disciples sit Shiva, seven days of intense mourning. Sunday will be the beginning of a long, hard, sad week.

The disciples also talk quietly. They hang their heads, ashamed of their behavior – their cowardice – of standing sufficiently far away so no one would identify them as his followers – and Peter is especially distressed, knowing he might have followed, but when given the chance to speak up and say, “Yes, I am with him,” chose instead to deny him, saying, “I am not one of his disciples!” They talk about Judas – what was he thinking? Why did he do what he did? Could they have seen it coming, talked him out of

it? And where is he now? “If only we could get our hands on him, we would....” Revenge is on their minds. They don’t know he already has, in despair and not trusting in God to forgive, hung himself.

It is a long day – it is not a “Holy Saturday” for them but rather a “hole -ly” Saturday, an empty pit. We say when someone dies that we have lost them. This loss creates a hole in our lives. For Jesus’ friends, followers, and family, the tragedy of Friday leaves an enormous hole in their lives. Their loss is compounded by their inability to act – fear and tradition keep them from participating in any outward expression of their grief. They can only sit, doing little or nothing, and wait – wait for the next day, the third day to dawn.

We live this day, this empty “hole-ly” day with them – his friends, followers, and family. In truth we live most of our days as if we know nothing about what will be learned in the morning. We too live in fear and trembling, holding on to old failures, old betrayals, old denials. We are incapacitated by shame and self-reproach, by the “if onlys” and the “what ifs”, and by the numbing, paralyzing grief of our deepest losses. We can easily be occupied

by thoughts of regret, blame, even revenge regarding what we had but now have lost.

So this day we are with them in the valley of the shadow of death. Weeping may last through the night, the Psalmist sings, but the promise remains, both for them and for us: the promise that joy comes in the morning.