

April 10, 2020

Good Friday

### Matthew 26:54 -- A Funeral That Changes Everything

Funerals are always endings. After the death, the family and friends conduct the final devotional acts of love in shutting the coffin and putting the body into the grave. Once it was done only by the family. Now we pay others to do it for us. But it is our final devotional act of love for those who die.

Jesus too is buried. Scripture tells us. We confess it every Sunday in the creed. He died and He was buried. The disciples did not know what to make of it all. The death of Christ scattered them as the prophets foretold. None of them was ready for the end. They were not there at the burial. Only Joseph of Arimathea and a few of the women who followed Jesus. He did not even get His own grave but borrowed the tomb Joseph had cut out of stone for his own family's use.

But this time the grave is not the end. The story is not over. The enemies of our Lord secure the grave because they knew the promise of Jesus to rise again. They wanted to make sure that no hanky panky took place. They did not expect our Lord to rise but they did not want a lie to steal the hearts of the people. So they secured the grave with a stone and guards.

Jesus was buried alright. But the story does not end with a body, a grave, and a burial. Tonight is the funeral for Jesus.

But it is a funeral like no other. We will end this Good Friday expecting to be back for Easter. We will return to hear the rest of the story, knowing already the grave is not the end, death did not win, and the victory is the Lord's still.

Holy Week does not re-enact what Jesus did. We can never do that. We know what happens at the end. There is no surprise left for us. We already know and even now anticipate the future that our Lord has for us when death must cough Him up and bow to the Lord of life and of death.

The surprise for us is not whether Jesus will remain in the tomb. The surprise for us is that we will not. What we see on Good Friday and what we will come back for on Sunday is the pledge and promise of our own futures in which we shall not die but live. Because of this funeral on Good Friday, all our funerals are also transformed from mournful memories of an end to the promise of a future in which death has no power.

There is more to come. Not only in the story of Jesus but in our own stories. What does Paul say: Do not grieve as the ignorant who have no hope. In other words, do not give up to death what

does not belong to death. And that is why this Friday is called Good. Because Jesus died for you, you do not belong to death anymore. You belong to life. Your body will lay in the tomb but it will wait for the Easter God prepared for you. Jesus was buried. This is no small detail. His death was not a fake. Neither is His life a matter of wishful thinking. Because He died for you, you will not die eternally. Because He lives for you, you will rise in Him to your own joyful resurrection. Because He died and sanctified the grave, we cannot look at death or the grave in the same way again.

Funerals are endings. Complete with pictures of the past, tears of loss, and hearts broken in love. That is all they would be. Except that Jesus died and was buried. He has sanctified the graves of all the saints so that those who die in Christ, live in Him. He has emptied the grave of its power. It no longer holds for us the ending but the beginning. To be sure, our bodies will wait in the grave but as a sleep from which Christ will awaken us to new flesh and new blood and new life forever.

Because our Lord died and was buried, we cannot look at death and the grave in the same way again. We watch. We wait. He is the first born of the dead, of those who sleep in the grave, but there is so very much more to come. His death has ended the terror of sin and its reign of death. Like Christ, we go to the grave not as the defeated but as the victorious. He has already prepared the way. He has marched into hell and stolen the keys of death from Satan. Now He has the power to unlock sin and death for you and me and for the whole world.