

THE SATURDAY IN BETWEEN
Mark 15:48

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Turn in your Bibles to Mark 15:48.

Okay. I admit it. There is no such passage. And that is the point. We go from Good Friday to Resurrection Sunday, skipping the Saturday in-between.

We know what to do on Friday. We mourn because, on this day, our Christ was crucified. It is on this day that we imagine the nails piercing His hands and His feet, the thorns bruising His brow, the hurled insults from soldiers and the crowd, stinging like stones.

We know what to do on Friday. Friday is a day of devastation. It's a day of standing and staring at the cross, where the one you love the most has been crucified.

We're well aware, also, of what we should do on Sunday. On Sunday, we don't stare at a cross. Rather, we gaze at an empty tomb. We celebrate light and life, for the earth had been dark, and death, seemingly, had defeated the Messiah. On Sunday, on Easter, we celebrate the most important event in the history of humanity – the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth from the dead.

On Friday, we know how to worship. We mourn. We gather in solemn assemblies. On Easter Sunday we declare to each other, "He is alive!" even as those first believers celebrated that first day of the week after His death. But what do we do on Saturday?

Saturday doesn't get any press. We have a worship service on Good Friday and a time of celebration on Easter Sunday, but Saturday is silent. Saturday is that time of waiting – that horrid time of waiting.

Saturday is a day of waiting – waiting and watching, longing and hoping.

Waiting is so hard. In most hospitals, they have something called a "waiting room." You might as well label it a torture chamber. In fact, it seems the only honest thing to do. Just put a sign up that says, "Welcome to the torture chamber." It doesn't matter how plush the carpet, how many televisions adorn the walls, or how many soda pop machines are in place. It's still torture.

One writer said, "Is there any more annoying, exasperating experience in 'civilized' life than being at the wrong end of an interminable, serpentine line of humanity? And the slowest and most frustrating line occurs at the ER. You slip on the ice and hear a wrenching crunch as you land. You make it quickly to the hospital emergency room. You get there and the place looks like the shopping mall on the day after Thanksgiving. There are squalling babies and bleeding do-it-yourselfers, frightened wheezing great-grandfathers, all of them in

desperate need – and all of them ahead of you and your throbbing back injury. Everyone there feels awful, and everyone there resents having to wait in line for medical attention. Everybody in the room is surly, snappish, and snarling.” (www.homeleticsonline.com, “Waiting Rooms”)

And you wait. Sometimes not for an hour, but for five or six hours in the emergency room waiting room.

Time spent waiting seems so much like lost time.

Or, perhaps, you like waiting on the tarmac – blazing in the Dallas sun at DFW while, for some reason, your plane just has to sit. A hint of claustrophobia, accompanied by the fact they can't run the air conditioner while you're sitting on the tarmac (at least, it seems to me they don't run it), all combine together for that one-of-a-kind torture experience of waiting. The kid behind you kicks you seat three more times. The passenger beside you snores and drools as if he were oblivious to the whole nightmare. And the flight attendant informs you that after two hours of waiting on the tarmac you're going back to the terminal because of mechanical failure.

Perhaps the best one happened in 1999 when Floyd Dean felt trapped aboard a Northwest flight waiting to leave Las Vegas for Detroit. He was so exasperated by the lack of decent food that he just left the airplane – got off the plane. He hailed a cab and went into town, where he had a bite to eat. About 90 minutes later he returned to the plane, which still hadn't taken off. It couldn't take off: Dean was the pilot. The 150 passengers had to sit and wait the 90 minutes on the tarmac while Dean had his lunch. (Dean was fired, I'm happy to say.)

Airlines in the United States performed worse in 2019 than the year before in getting flights to destinations on time, while the share of flights canceled climbed for the third straight year. Over all, 21 percent of flights in 2019 arrived late. And 1.9% of all flights were cancelled! Airlines reported 302 tarmac delays longer than three hours on domestic flights, and 26 delays of more than four hours on international flights. (“Airline flights get worse in 2019, *New York Times*, 2/19/20)

Sometimes waiting is unbearable. Like waiting for your lost child to be found. Can you imagine that kind of waiting? Torture of tortures.

Every moment seemed like a month. Every second seemed a whole season. He was gone. They looked up to count heads while juggling spring bedding begonias and three kids, only to discover that the youngest, a two-year-old twin, had disappeared into the suburban jungle – more quickly and quietly than a snake might slither away – unnoticed, without sound or fanfare.

Panic starts as a soft whisper just before it deafens your drums. You convince yourself for the first thirty seconds that losing your two-year-old is no big deal, but after a minute the passion of panic is overwhelming.

Dad runs to the major street, the first point of danger. Mom calls grandparents, neighbors, anyone who might help. An older sister calls his name, “Blake. Blake,” only to be slapped by stunned silence. She whimpers a cry.

Hysteria attacks Mom, as neighbors comb the streets and back alleys. He was just here. Where could he possibly be? Why didn’t we watch? Why won’t he answer our cries?

You know those times when you wait. Wait for hope. Pray for relief. Ponder the possibilities and fear the worst. Has evil been lurking in the shadows for your boy?

Waiting to hug your son, to know he has been found. Time passes as if you’re holding your breath under water. Tension rises. Hope sinks.

Frantically, though she had done so many times already, Mom checked his room just once more. Instinct? Intuition? She walks back into his bedroom, compelled by fear, driven by hope, carried by grace.

A toe. Just a fat toe sticking out from underneath his crib’s plaid dust ruffle. Perhaps he turned in his sleep, and a toe’s worth of hope emerged where there had been none – despite umpteen trips into his bedroom. Safely, soundly asleep beneath his bed, curled under the crib, where he had never slept before. While all others in his two-year-old world were wringing their hands, halting their hearts, a chubby toe ends the waiting, halts the horror.

A toe’s worth of hope.

What about the disciples? They had seen their Lord, their Master, their Savior crucified. They had left everything to follow Him. They had abandoned their businesses. Waved goodbye to their families. They had been walking in lock-step with the Messiah for the last three years.

And now, just when they needed Him the most, He was gone.

The images of Friday were almost surreal, swirling around in their heads like a movie that had no pause, no stop button. There was no way the horror could be ejected. “If they crucified our Teacher, are they coming for us next?” Peter had gone so far as to deny he had anything to do with this man by the name of Jesus. Swearing and cursing, he had declared, “I don’t even know the man.”

They were not looking for a resurrected Messiah. Rather, they were sitting and waiting in that stunned silence that only the pressure of a real panic can produce.

It’s those hard to handle gaps in life, those times between the panic of Friday and the joy of Sunday. It’s those holy Saturdays, sometimes, that get us the most. How do you do it? How do you handle life when nothing happens? How do you fill up those hard to endure dry spells that choke your days? How do you keep faith when God seems to be keeping secrets instead of keeping promises? How do you wait? How do you live on Saturday – between the cross and resurrection?

That Saturday, indeed, there were many loose ends and much unfinished business. **Mary Magdalene, Simon Peter, and others must simply wait. This is a day for discernment and discovery between crucifixion and the possibility of change. This is a time between dreams, a time without a name – an empty space in the world and the lifetime within which a new sense of the world could emerge.**

Waiting changes you. So painful. But so transforming. Each holy Saturday, each day of waiting is in some ways a sacred gift from God that reminds us that we are not ultimately in control of our destiny. Waiting teaches us tolerance, trust, patience, and endurance. In waiting we discover that life comes after death, that joy follows sorrow, that hope defeats despair. (Rev. John T. Harries, Timothy Eaton Memorial Church, “The Empty Tomb,” 4/22/2000)

As we come to the Markan text, we make some observations.

Look at verse 10. An angelic being had ordered Mary Magdalene to go and tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus was alive. She reported the good news to those who had been with Him. But notice how she found them – what state they were in, what state they had been in on Saturday. They were mourning and weeping (verse 10).

In fact, verse 11 tells us that when they heard that He was alive and that she had seen Him, they refused to believe it. In verse 14, Jesus appeared to them. He reproaches them for their unbelief and, notice, the “hardness of heart,” because they had not believed those who had seen Him after He had risen.

The problem with Holy Saturday is that you only have half the news. You have news of the death, but you don’t have news of the life.

Waiting is a hard time.

They say a trial lawyer’s toughest job is waiting for a verdict. Attorney George Wilson treats himself to a good lunch. Lou DeVoto, another trial lawyer, talks to his clients, sometimes for hours. Glenn Zeitz bites his nails.

There is not much else for them and other South Jersey attorneys to do while awaiting a verdict when a jury deliberates the fate of a client on trial. Day after day after day. One attorney, Jeffrey Zucker, said, “I pace a lot. During 13 days of deliberation in a federal case in Trenton, I wore out a pair of shoes.”

Dennis Wixted returns to his office to wait for a jury question or verdict, attempting to get some paperwork done. When he’s in the courthouse, he usually has an open statute book in his lap or on a table, though others have noticed he never turns a page.

One attorney said, “You review the case like a movie, going over each scene, playing it all back. You think of what you could have done differently. Then you think of the jurors: Should you have challenged one or another? If the jury sends a question, you imagine all

the different reasons. And then when it's over, you find they all were wrong." ("Lawyers' toughest job: waiting for a verdict," Renee Winkler, *Courier-Post* staff, www.southjerseynews.com/neulander/m111101j.htm)

Waiting is hard. Waiting for the verdict. Waiting for the word.

Perhaps the hospital had taken certain tests, say, and how they will turn out, only time will tell. Your life may just depend on how they do turn out. So you lie there in the dark straining to hear time's tale ahead of time, because waiting time is always time strained, time searched and listened to, till past time, present time, future time all start to whisper at once – the past in all its preciousness and never more precious than now; the present in all its dark impenetrability; the future in whatever form it is to come. Morning will come at last, and with it the word you wait for will be spoken at last: the word that you hope for, long for, until you can all but hear it already, which is the word, of course, that gives you back your life again. (Frederick Buechner, *A Room Called Remember*, p. 130)

Waiting. Waiting between jobs. Waiting for test results. Waiting between relationships. Waiting on God.

Many of you read devotional books by Henri Nouwen. In a book called *Sabbatical Journeys*, he writes about some friends of his who were trapeze artists. They were with the circus, and their lives had an effect on him. They were called The Flying Roudellas. One thing they told Henri Nouwen is that there's a very special relationship between the flyer and the catcher on the trapeze. The flyer is the one that lets go, and the catcher is the one that catches. As you might imagine, this relationship is important – especially to the flyer. When the flyer is swinging high above the crowd on the trapeze, the moment comes when he must let go. He arcs out into the air, and his job is to remain as still as possible and to wait for the strong hands of the catcher to pluck him from the air. The trapeze artist told Nouwen, "The flyer must never try to catch the catcher." The flyer must wait in absolute trust. The catcher will catch him. But he must wait. (John Ortberg, "Waiting on God, *Preaching Today* Tape 199)

The disciples waited. Uncertain. Unsure. Frightened. Crippled by chaos, they waited. There really didn't seem to be much else they could do.

What are you waiting on this morning? What word captures your heart?

Lonely.

Hurt.

Afraid.

Feeling inadequate.

Misunderstood.

Discouraged.

Forsaken.

Abused.

Unglued.

Depressed.

Lukewarm.

Anxious.

Waiting

...for the birth after conception.

...for the kids to launch their life after graduation.

...for another job after a termination.

...for a new relationship after separation.

...for treatment after the diagnosis.

...for a new sense of identity after retirement.

...for plenty after poverty.

...for healing and reconciliation when things have fallen apart.

...for hope after the death of a loved one.

We can only imagine that the caterpillar must have met Alice in Wonderland on Holy Saturday. “Who are you?” he asked. “I – I hardly know, sir, just at present,” Alice replied rather shyly. “At least I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have changed several times sine then.” (Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, p. 47) That is the kind of day that Mary Magdalene and all the followers of Jesus were having in this gospel account. They felt lost, vulnerable, and unsure of themselves. (John T. Harries, “The Empty Tomb”)

They were changing; all was changing.

They were waiting. Waiting, perhaps, for just a toe’s worth of hope.

But they got more than a toe’s worth of hope. They got a bodily resurrection. The Christ was alive. Death had been defeated.

It’s the good news of Easter that I shout this morning. Christ is risen! Christ is saving! Christ is healing! Christ is protecting! Christ is leading! Christ is calling! Christ is alive!

I don’t know what you’re waiting for this morning, but could there be a better word than, “The tomb is empty”? Could there be more peace than the peace that comes from following the resurrected Christ?

Some of you this morning find yourself on that Friday – still locked in panic. Others are in the waiting phase of Saturday – confused, depressed, unsure. Today, let’s all draw ourselves to that first Sunday. Let’s all hear the words the Divine Being spoke to Mary. “Do not be amazed. You were looking for Jesus the Nazarene who has been crucified. He has risen. He is not here. Behold, here is the place where they have laid Him. Go and tell.”

Go and tell.

Saturday is over. Wait no more! Sunday is here!