



The gateway
Reverend Judith Wigglesworth
Easter Vigil, 15 April 2017
Exodus 14:10-31, 15:20-21
Romans 6:3-11
Matthew 28:1-10

*Lord God, we wait with you and upon you this night.
You are among us; speak to us; call us.*

“Sometimes you can do only so much.

A good gardener knows when it is time to work the soil, enrich it with nutrients, and plant the seed – and when it is time to wait and see whether growth will come. You cannot reach into the soil and pry open the seed to force it to sprout. It doesn't work that way. A good parent knows when it is time to instruct, model, and discipline – and when it is time to wait and see whether growth will come. You can't force a child into maturity. It doesn't work that way.

On Holy Saturday, good women who have readied spices and oils to prepare Jesus' lifeless body for burial cease from carrying out that work. Their inactivity is not borne of despair or laziness or denial. Rather, they know what time it is. It is Sabbath. It is the day set aside to observe that you can do only so much. Work is not the be all and end all of life. Or faith. There is need for rest. There is need for remembrance of the One who delivered Israel from unending labour in Egypt. There is need for remembrance of the One who rested on the seventh day of Creation. You can do only so much.

Holy Saturday stands as a gracious reminder that all does not rest on our shoulders, even in the midst of death. The Sabbath rest taken by these women becomes a parable of Sabbath's trust in God. For when you and I reach the limits of what we can do – and what we cannot – Sabbath beckons us to step back. To be still. To renew our spirits in the presence of God and with the gift of community. To accept that some things go beyond our powers to manipulate or change. To trust God when we encounter those limits.

The limits on that first Holy Saturday were defined by a stone-sealed tomb. There was nothing the women could do to change that. The body and fate of Jesus were out of their hands.

But keeping Sabbath on Holy Saturday serves as prelude to the truth that, just because matters are out of our hands, does not mean that they are out of God's hands.”¹

Today, Holy Saturday, we have waited.

We have been limited by the stone-sealed tomb.

Yesterday, when that tomb was sealed, we heard the crowd shout “Crucify him!”.

We saw Jesus mocked and battered.

We heard the banging of the nails piercing his hands and feet.

We saw Jesus breathe his last.

We felt the earth shake and saw the curtain of the temple torn in two.

We saw the body of Jesus taken down from the cross and placed in the stone-sealed tomb.

We have waited today. We could only do so much.

Until now. Until tonight. Now we gather because the waiting is over.

We kindled an Easter fire which sparked new light.

We recalled the Passover, the deliverance of the people of Israel from slavery.

We now bear witness to a tomb that has been emptied of death.

¹ *Way Words – A Daily Itinerary for Lent*, by John Indermark, p105-106.

Never again will death have the last word.
Tonight is a gateway to new life.

The fire we kindled and the candles we lit tonight are outward symbols of this new life, which blazed from an empty tomb.
They are also symbols of new life within us.
Jesus' light meets our light tonight.
Jesus' life meets our life tonight, in this gateway.

There is more, much more to this story. But while we are here in this gateway tonight, what might Jesus – the risen Jesus – say to us?
I wonder if he might say something like this...

My Beloved

You're here. Standing with me tonight in this gateway to new life.

Let's stand together. Let's wait for a bit.

I'm with you, however uncomfortably or comfortably you're standing in this gateway: seeking, questioning, wondering, cautious, hopeful, excited...

Just don't stand here as if you've arrived. Don't stand here as if the journey is over. Even tomorrow, when you'll sing your Alleluias and praise God our Father, never forget that it's just the beginning.

This gateway is a blessed waiting space.

But it's not a gateway into a beautiful, safe new world of hope and peace. It's a gateway into a world where fear still claims the upper hand, and where we – you and I – are the hope-givers and the peace-bearers.

Please come with me through this gateway.

The world needs both of us.

God, Abba, has called us both to place ourselves in God's hands.

There are no limits on what we can do, together.

Love from Jesus.