

Holy Saturday Devotional Reflection

The Rev. Dr. Alyssa Bell '11



Hebrews 4:1-16

1 Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest is still open, let us take care that none of you should seem to have failed to reach it. 2 For indeed the good news came to us just as to them; but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. 3 For we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said,

*"As in my anger I swore,
'They shall not enter my rest,' "*

though his works were finished at the foundation of the world. 4 For in one place it speaks about the seventh day as follows, "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works." 5 And again in this place it says, "They shall not enter my rest." 6 Since therefore it remains open for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, 7 again he sets a certain day—"today"—saying through David much later, in the words already quoted,

*"Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts."*

8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not speak later about another day. 9 So then, a sabbath rest still remains for the people of God; 10 for those who enter God's rest also cease from their labors as God did from his. 11 Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs.

12 Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.

14 Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Reflection

In a world that celebrates productivity as evidence of our worthiness, rest can feel impossible. What will happen if I stop? How will people know that I am doing my part? I am grateful for the rhythms of the church year that invite us to slow down, and Holy Saturday offers us a particularly unique and sacred pause.

In Hebrews chapter 4, the author gives the listener a little collection of theological themes. Sabbath rest, the profound holiness of scripture, and the grace offered us by Jesus our high priest fill this pericope with enough content to populate a lengthy sermon series or Bible study class. What do rest, scripture, and grace have to say to us this Holy Saturday as we wait for the resurrection of our Lord Jesus?

With the rich tradition of scripture reminding us that rest matters deeply to our faith—as much to us as it did to our Hebrew ancestors in the faith—we encounter at the end of this passage a stunning picture of grace. On Good Friday, Jesus our high priest has destroyed the dividing curtain, allowing us entrance and welcome. We are forgiven.

Grace is the means by which we can truly enter sabbath rest. We can cease our mustered-up striving and instead strive with Christ; we can lay our heads down and let go, trusting in Jesus to be in charge. This Holy Saturday, we receive the gift of grace and rest. Jesus has accomplished our salvation and is destroying death in a few short hours. Let us be still. Jesus is doing the work. Amen.

Prayer

God of creation and rest, thank you for the gift of your scriptures drawing us to yourself this Holy Saturday, and for Jesus Christ, who accomplished our salvation on the cross. Through the presence and power of your Holy Spirit, we ask for your help to rest. By your grace, we pause and let go. Amen.