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Holy Saturday: 1 Peter 4:1-8 & Luke 23:50-56

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No longer living for our passions. The burial of Jesus.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

1 Peter 4 verses 1-8 1 Peter 4 verses 1-8 Recognizing the pattern of Christ and his sufferings, the Apostle Peter argues that we must take the same course. In chapter 4 of his first epistle, he describes in generic terms the way that a person who follows Christ's example will behave. Whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh, no longer for human passions, but for the will of God.

Although people's former way of life might have been characterized by pursuit of their passions, now they have taken on the mantle of Christ, they follow a very different course. They have ceased from sin, that pattern of behavior that they once gave themselves to. It is no longer habitual for them, and now they live for the will of God.

There is a watershed point in their lives between before and afterwards. In the time beforehand, they had all the time that they wanted for living as the Gentiles do, for sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry, all of

those practices that brought no profit. And the people who continue to practice these things are surprised when Christians don't join them.

Yet those behaviors are a sort of flood of debauchery that they are being drowned under, and though they speak ill of Christians, their judgment is near at hand, and they will have to give an account to the one who will judge the living and the dead. Verse 6 is another difficult verse to understand, for this is why the Gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does. Is this a reference back to the spirits in prison that were mentioned previously? I don't believe that it is.

Rather I think it relates to the preceding verse, Christ is going to judge the living and the dead, and the Gospel has been preached even to those who have died. Even though they have suffered the consequences of death in the flesh, the way that people more generally do, they might live in the spirit the way that God does, and they will be raised on the last day. Concerns about the death of Christians seem to have been common within the early church, as it wasn't entirely clear to some how those who died prior to the second coming of Christ would participate in his resurrection.

Here, as Paul does in chapter 4 of 1 Thessalonians, Peter wants to assure his hearers that those who have died in Christ, who have heard the Gospel and responded to it, will also live in the spirit with them. They will also be raised up. The last times are introduced by the death and resurrection of Christ.

In a few years after Peter's writing of this epistle, Jerusalem will be destroyed, an event that would radically transform the covenantal coordinates of the world. The nearness of the day of the Lord is a common theme throughout the New Testament writings. James 5, verse 8 Romans 13, verses 11-12 1 John 2, verse 18 1 John 2, verse 12 Philippians 4, verse 5 Almost 2000 years after these letters, what are we to make of such statements? It might be helpful to distinguish between a theology of eschatological imminence and a chronology of eschatological imminence.

The present age is penultimate, and in the light of Christ, the judgment that we await in the future is already in the process of arriving. The future that we await at the end is already incipiently operative in the present age. This, however, is not the same thing as saying that the final day of the Lord is going to occur in just a few years' time.

Recognizing all of this, we must be alert, sober, to stay awake and be vigilant. The Apostle Paul makes a similar point in 1 Thessalonians 5, verses 4-8 He put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. Having slept in death on Holy Saturday, Christ rose on Easter Day, and as a result, as we look forward to that final day and to the general resurrection, we are looking forward to something that has already been realized in Him, and to something of which we already have a foretaste and an anticipation as we live in Him.

As the realities of the end of history are already at work in the middle of history, we must live our lives accordingly. We must keep our wits about us, be alert, we must recognize the transitory character of current activities. We must be sober so that we can watch and pray, bracing ourselves for the coming of the time of testing.

We must keep ourselves prepared for prayer, we must keep short accounts with God, and be at peace with our neighbours. We are marked out as children of God by our love and our commitment to each other. This will be increasingly important as the times of testing comes.

Love covers a multitude of sins. Similar statements are found in James 5, verses 19-20 My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins. Love is needed for solidarity and mutual support, especially in times of persecution.

Love also forgives. A question to consider. In verse 7 of this chapter, Peter argues that we must be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of our prayers.

What might we learn from this verse about Peter's understanding of the role and the purpose of prayer in the Christian life? Luke chapter 23, verses 50-56 Now there was a man named Joseph from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man, who had not consented to their decision and action, and he was looking for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb cut in stone, where no one had ever yet been laid. It was the day of preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid.

Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment. At the end of Luke chapter 23, Luke introduces Joseph of Arimathea to us.

This is our first time encountering this person. He is a member of the council, which is surprising, considering the part the council had in the condemnation of Christ to his death. He was not, however, one of those who consented to the council's decision.

He is described as a good and righteous man, looking for the kingdom of God. This might recall the characterization of figures such as Simeon at the beginning of Luke. Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

Luke chapter 2 verse 25. It also recalls the beginning of Luke's gospel, where Jesus' body

had earlier been wrapped and laid in something, wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. In that account there had been a Joseph and a Mary.

The death and the resurrection of Christ should be seen as a new birth event. There is a fulfillment here of Isaiah chapter 53 verse 9, making the grave of Christ with a rich man at his death. Jesus is buried in a way that shows honour to his body.

The tomb in which Jesus is buried is cut into the rock. As Jesus emerges he will be like a stone taken from a quarry. Isaiah chapter 51 verse 1. You who seek the Lord, look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug.

Jesus Christ is the great stone that will become the chief cornerstone of a new temple. We might think here of the stones of Solomon's temple, described in 1 Kings chapter 7 verses 9 to 12. A stone is placed over the entrance to the tomb.

This stone will have to be removed for Jesus to come forth. The grave as we see it in the Gospels is also a prison, covered by a stone, sealed and guarded by soldiers. When Christ comes forth he breaks open the prison of the grave and also the prison of his tomb.

The women are present at the burial and at the tomb. They are present at the cross, present at the burial and present on the morning of resurrection. They are in many respects the heart of the faithful community.

We can often focus upon the male apostles as the appointed leaders and guardians of the people of Christ. But Christ himself wants us to attend also to the women and the children at the heart as models of faith. The chapter ends with the rest of the Sabbath.

The resting of the women on the Sabbath parallels Jesus' resting in the tomb on the Sabbath. At the end of his great work on the sixth day, Jesus had cried out, it is finished. The work of the old creation had been wrapped up, completed in the work of the cross.

And on the seventh day, the day of the Sabbath, Jesus rested. Luke 24 verse 1 will introduce the first day of a new creation. A question to consider.

We have noted some of the parallels between Christ's birth and his death and resurrection. What are some further details that might help us to fill out these connections?