

Week 21 – Holy Saturday

This lesson is our final one in our Lenten discussion. Because the liturgy is so short, we can also use the day to talk a little about the structure of the Easter Vigil, just to prepare the students for what they will experience – doing so will help encourage students to pay attention at the Vigil (assuming the Vigil happens before the Vigil lesson does).

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, send your Holy Spirit into this room that we might grow to understand how our life together binds us with your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and that same Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Texts for Discussion

- Liturgy for Holy Saturday (BCP 283)
- Job 14:1-14
- 1 Peter 4:1-8
- “In the midst of life” (BCP 492)
- Alternatively, just talk about the liturgy and move on to the Vigil summary

Primary Take Aways

- On this last day of Lent, we contemplate the death of Christ, his descent to the dead, and we are reminded of our funeral service. We sit in anticipation, both for Easter and for the resurrection of the dead.

Important Links to Previous Weeks (“Where We Are”)

- Holy Saturday is the one day of the year the Eucharist isn’t administered
- Draw our baptismal picture
- Remind students of the order of Holy Week; we are waiting for Easter

Important Background

- See previous weeks.

Structure

In this lesson, our goal is once again just to walk through the liturgy and think a little about what we’re saying happens on this day.

<p><i>Discussion questions:</i></p>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you notice about this liturgy, just looking at it? |
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It's short. It has a collect, some readings, and then an anthem before we say the Lord's Prayer and the Grace. There is no dismissal.

Let's divide them into groups and assign a reading to each group. If there aren't enough for four groups, do the OT and the Epistle.

Discussion question:

- If this was the only reading we had today, what would it suggest our focus is?

Job 14:1-14: Students may not know the story of Job so it can be helpful to remind them of it. Job throughout the book maintains his innocence – and we know from the prologue that he is right – and here he meditates on the fact that death comes for everyone. While there is “hope for the tree” (v. 8), there is no hope for a human to come to life again. For Job, death is better than suffering because he will not have to suffer anymore, but on this day, we can think a bit more about what this passage implies about the OT conception of death: it is final. You live and you die. That's what many people think today – it's not a new idea to think the resurrection doesn't happen! – and we sit with it on Holy Saturday, this possibility that death is final, but we don't despair because we wait in anticipation for the resurrection on the next day, much as we anticipate our own resurrection.

Psalms 31:1-5: The Psalmist here asks for God to rescue him. The Psalmist commits his spirit to God and trusts that God will redeem him because God is faithful. (Jesus says these words on the cross.)

Psalms 130: God is such that no one can stand before him if he takes our iniquities into account. And yet we can hope in God, can wait on him, because just as the dawn comes, so is God faithful to return to his people. God redeems Israel. So as we wait on Holy Saturday, we wait for the Lord, more than watchmen for the morning, and just as those watchmen, so also we can trust that the Lord will come. This time in resurrection.

Both Psalms suggest that, even when we feel abandoned, we can trust God.

1 Peter 4:1-8: There are odd passages in the NT – this is one of them – that suggest Jesus preached to those already dead. Some have read these passages as saying that on Holy Saturday Jesus descended to hell, where he broke open the gates. Others see in the passage a metaphor – we're dead in our sin and yet the Gospel is preached to us. But the point is roughly the same: Christ suffered in his flesh and was willing to endure agony for righteousness' sake. So also should we, knowing that the end is near. And we know that because the resurrection of Christ has happened. This passage suggests that Christ's death changes our approach to life.

Matthew or John: Both talk about Jesus being laid in the tomb. They don't talk about resurrection, again emphasizing that we are waiting for Easter.

Discussion question:

- Okay, we've all said what we think our individual passages say, but what do they say together?

They let us look at the way that, even now, after Easter, we live in a world that doesn't look quite like it should look. But because of Easter, we can trust that God is the God of the living, the one who endured the agony and shame of the cross for us and, in doing so, opened to us the way to eternal life. So we should act accordingly, not as though death is the end, but as though life is. So we don't do things that lead to death – that's what 1 Peter is suggesting. We do things that lead to life.

Now let's look at "In the midst of life." Get a volunteer to read the first stanza and refrain.

Discussion question:

- After each stanza, ask the group what it's saying.

1. Even when we are going about our day-to-day lives, death is all around. But God is there with us. We repent because we are not living as we should. But God will forgive us.
2. God knows even what we think when we are alone – and we don't normally want anyone to know that – so we repent because it's not about our actions only but also about our inward disposition. But God will forgive us.
3. Death is such a final thing, such a horrible thing, that we here pray that God would hold us to himself even when that horrible thing might tempt us to turn away from him.

Discussion question:

- What is the significance of saying this prayer on Holy Saturday?

Here is where the significance of walking in Jesus' footsteps year-by-year can be emphasized. These prayers show up not just in Lent but also at funerals and burials because that is where our faith faces its most profound challenge. St. Paul himself says that, if the resurrection of Jesus did not happen, then Christians are the most to be pitied. We will have been living a lie. But we believe the resurrection happened. Holy Saturday – really all of Lent – is a time for us to face that challenge and to say, "All of us go down to the dust; yet even at the grave we make our song: Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia" (BCP 499). Lent begins with us recognizing our mortality because we will die. It ends when Easter celebrates the resurrection of Jesus. The whole process is there to remind us that – while we are dust and will return to dust – God is the God of life, who creates the very dust

from which we were made and who, therefore, can call life from death and make all things new.

Closing Prayer

Today's prayer can be the prayer about the sting of death from the Burial II (BCP 504).

The Lord bless us and keep us; the Lord make his face to shine upon us and be gracious unto us; the Lord lift up his countenance upon us and give us peace.

Cheat Sheet

10 minutes: Welcome, Prayer, Candle Lighting, Where we are

Heavenly Father, send your Holy Spirit into this room that we might grow to understand how our life together binds us with your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and that same Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Discussion question:

- What do you notice about this liturgy, just looking at it?

20 minutes: Divide into Groups and Look at the Readings

Main point: Even now, after Easter, the world doesn't look quite like it should. But because of Easter, we can trust that God is the God of the living, and we should live accordingly.

Discussion questions:

- If yours was the only reading we had today, what would it suggest our focus is?
- Okay, we've all said what we think our individual passages say, but what do they say together?

10 minutes: "In the midst of life"

Main point: Lent reminds us that – while we are dust and will return to dust – God is the God of life, who creates the very dust from which we were made and who, therefore, can call life from death and make all things new.

Discussion question:

- What is the significance of saying this prayer on Holy Saturday?

10 minutes: Closing Prayer

The prayer about the sting of death from the Burial II (BCP 504).

The Lord bless us and keep us; the Lord make his face to shine upon us and be gracious unto us; the Lord lift up his countenance upon us and give us peace.