

The sound of silence

Bible reading: Lamentations 3.25-33; Matthew 27.55-66

*Joseph took the body of Jesus and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth,
and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock.
He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb, and went away.
Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.*

Silence on the radio is a very powerful thing. Last night's broadcast of the St Matthew Passion was a recording from the Proms (Berlin Phil, Simon Rattle). It ended with a full minute's unscripted silence — stunned, heartfelt silence — before the applause broke out. It was the only possible response to the emotional impact of the events of Good Friday which we had just lived through. It's no accident that both the Bach Passions end with *rest: Ruht wohl, rest in peace*, the choir sing to Jesus: *Mein Jesu, gute Nacht!*

Holy Saturday is a day of rest. It was the sabbath, so no work or business could be done. A day of waiting. Grief is exhausting. Sometimes we need to be kind to ourselves (even in lockdown!) and allow ourselves time to recuperate from the emotional traumas of the past few weeks. Even in the midst of lamentation, "*It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord*" — 4Q

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem is built over an ancient quarry, just outside the city walls, which could well be the actual spot where Jesus was crucified. It's a confusing jumble of chapels which takes you on a journey from the hill of Golgotha to the cave of the empty tomb. In between, right by the door so it's the first thing you see as your eyes adjust from the bright sunlight, is a great marble slab set into the floor. Traditionally, this is where Jesus' body was laid out and prepared for burial. It's worn smooth and shiny from centuries of devotion, always surrounded by weeping, touching women.

It reminds us how important are the rituals of death — the caring, the washing, the fondling: treating the dead with dignity and respect, allowing the living to weep, to touch, to say good-bye. One of the saddest things about this epidemic is the way those natural impulses are being denied or curtailed from fear of infection: hospitals without visitors, funerals without mourners. The day of Jesus' burial is a good day to say a prayer for all those who are dying and will die today, isolated from their loved ones; for those who need to say good-bye; and for the over-stretched but still caring medical staff who hold their hands at the end. Each one valued and unique: each one held in the arms of God.

*O God, who brought us to birth, and in whose arms we die:
in our grief and shock, contain and comfort us, embrace us with your love:
give us hope in our confusion, and grace to let go into new life:
through Jesus Christ, Amen.*

The card below was sent me from the Cathedral. It seems an appropriate place to end, on this day of waiting.

*Low in the grave he lay, Jesus, my Saviour:
Waiting the coming day, Jesus, my Lord.*

God bless, Loveday

