

Last Sunday morning,

I told Whit that I saw something on Facebook  
about Holy Saturday that really struck me.

And because I am a product  
of my own digital generation,  
(habitual or mindless scrolling,  
I think is what it is called),  
well because of that,

I can't remember who posted the thought.

It isn't mine,

so let me go ahead and make that disclaimer.

But it has been rattling around in my brain  
for over a week now.

it has to do with Holy Week  
and the one day I've usually overlooked.

Last week as members

of the Christian family,

Holy Week

means we go through a lot of feels.



We are joyful on Palm Sunday!

The chance to wave palms in worship  
delights youngest to the most senior  
among us.

A chance to be a little bit,  
Baptist and shout Hosanna!

We welcome a Lord and Savior

who rides into town,  
head held high,

even though he knows what is coming.

Then the week settles down and  
things are relatively quiet  
until we get to Thursday.



We come to Maundy Thursday,  
named for the Latin word for  
Jesus's new commandment given in the John's gospel,  
"I give you a new commandment,  
that you love one another.  
Just as I have loved you,  
you also should love one another."

Of course, it isn't really a new commandment per say  
—in Deuteronomy Moses relayed  
God's instruction to Israel  
that loving one's neighbor  
as you might love your own self  
was second only to first  
loving God.

But Maundy Thursday is where Jesus  
washed the feet of his disciples.  
Dirty, smelly feet.  
I haven't washed many feet,  
in a church setting  
but I can tell you  
that it is an intimate and holy thing.

In seminary I attended  
Central Presbyterian in Atlanta  
and each year for a while,  
they would host a foot washing service  
on Maundy Thursday.  
Mostly for the folks who slept in and around the church;  
Central is located right across the street

from the capital building downtown  
and they run a day care and shelter  
out of their church buildings  
during the week.

Washing the feet of someone  
who does not have access  
to regular showers  
or even toenail clippers;  
washing the feet of someone  
who has holes in their shoes and socks  
...well, to say it was intimate and holy  
is only the tip of the iceberg.  
It doesn't feel as humbling  
when my kids have been playing outside all day  
and come in the back door,  
feet blackened with dirt and grim.  
But washing their feet is a holy thing too.

The disciples and Jesus share a meal on Thursday,  
a Passover meal of some sorts.  
There isn't much known  
about how Jews in the first century  
would have celebrated this event in their homes.  
The tradition of a Seder meal  
didn't come for many years  
after Jesus' death and resurrection.

But Jesus says he eagerly wants  
to celebrate this holy remembrance with his friends.  
He wants to be at the table with them.

Going back to Palm Sunday  
it is joyful,  
but mixed with a slight anxiety.  
By the time we get to Thursday  
a more sober mood takes over  
as the anxiety of what is coming next  
builds.

Because we know what is coming.



Friday is full of sorrow and grief.

Friday is day of deep death.

We witness what humanity,  
is capable of,  
when it comes to perfect goodness and love.

We encounter it and cannot tolerate it.

We have the capacity to overlook things like  
a murderer, an insurrectionist, a thief,  
but to look at the goodness and love  
that turns our systems  
and politics and religion  
on its head...

we have within us the power  
to pin that love and goodness to a cross  
and put it to death.

And then we bury it,  
thinking we've done what is best.

Friday  
is heart-breaking.  
It is soul shattering.



But then we find ourselves on Sunday again!

And on Sunday!

It is a joy beyond joys!

The joy of Easter morning,  
in the columbarium  
—hope that next new minister  
is ready to get up early next year  
—I'm sure we woke up downtown  
with our singing and praises!  
Easter morning of birds, flowers, and spring!  
Easter morning joy  
where even I can't get through a  
'Jesus is on the loose!'  
without getting chocked up.

Seeing families and friends,  
joy!

Hearing us all sing our alleluias,  
joy!

Proclaiming the day doesn't belong to Caesar or Pilate,  
or any empire or nation;  
claiming the day belongs to the God,  
joy!

Singing the hallelujah chorus  
at the close of worship,  
joy!

Eating deviled eggs with bacon and jalapeño,  
joy!

Okay maybe that's just my family,  
but if you need this joy in your life  
talk to (my mother-in-law) Kathie.

See?  
Such an exhausting week of emotions.  
Up and down!  
And back up again.

But here's the part I'd never really given much thought.  
We've skipped a day in there,  
when it comes to the holy drama  
and that's what I'd like  
to call attention to.



Holy Saturday.

The silence and waiting of Holy Saturday.

The in-between-ness  
of Holy Saturday.

Years ago, at a presbytery meeting  
I heard Rev. Michael Bailey,  
who was at 1<sup>st</sup> Pres. Morganton at the time,  
give the best and only sermon  
I'd ever heard on Holy Saturday.  
If anyone else was there,  
maybe now the sermon count is up to, two.

It was a Holy Saturday thought  
that stopped my scrolling last week on Facebook.  
Saturday that odd and sometimes overlooked day,  
tucked in between  
the emotional spectacle of Easter.



This thought on Facebook<sup>1</sup> basically said,  
we don't spend the majority of our lives  
in the valleys and depths of sorrow  
that belong to Good Friday.

This doesn't mean  
that there are not moments  
of deep sorrow in our lives.

This doesn't not mean  
that we don't experience  
the grief and pain of death  
in our lives.

No, Good Friday  
means we know  
there are those aching places in our hearts.  
We know intimately those troubled places  
in our life's journey.

Good Friday means  
God knows what those places and times,  
moments and years feel like too.

But we don't spend  
most of our lives  
in that kind of sorrow and grief.



Nor do we spend the majority of our lives  
on the mountain tops of joy  
that mark Easter Sunday.

This doesn't mean that there aren't moments  
of pure unadulterated joy,  
when new life is born,  
and we now can't imagine life without it.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/FrJamesMartin>

Moments of elation  
where our hearts sing,  
and we know we are changed  
for the better.

No, Easter Sunday reminds us  
that joy is woven into the fabric our lives  
and that we are meant  
to celebrate and enjoy life here and now.

Remember that early church father  
who famous quipped,  
“The glory of God is a human being fully alive!”  
Yes, we are meant for joy.

Easter Sunday reminds us  
that our God lives  
for our joy to come alive.

But  
we don't spend most of our lives  
in that kind of excitement and joy.

So where do we spend most of our lives?

Maybe when spend it  
in moments of Holy Saturday.  
I think we live out our days  
between the valleys and mountain tops.  
Doesn't that strike your heart as true?  
Imagine if you will for a moment,  
what we do on that Saturday.  
Or try and think back  
to what you did last week.





Just like the disciples waiting,  
sometimes listening in silence—  
for a stone to finally roll away  
—doesn't that feel a lot like wondering  
if you should take that new job,  
that new position in the company,  
or that waiting for the acceptance letter in the mail  
from the school you really want to go to?

Or maybe the waiting  
is less silent but just as active?  
I doubt many of us kept  
a solemn vigil last Saturday.  
We knew what Friday meant  
and what Sunday would bring,  
but we likely didn't sit and fast  
on Holy Saturday.

We waited.  
We did not sit  
in the grief of Friday.  
But we also did not  
give our hearts  
to the joy of Sunday yet either.

Saturday, we waited.  
We ran our errands.  
We made marinated the lamb or ham or the tenderloin.  
We made sure we had enough chocolate eggs  
or jellybeans or quarters,  
to go inside those plastic eggs.  
We waited.

Just like Whit quoted last week  
—we usually think in terms  
of only Friday and Sunday when it comes to Holy Week—  
remember when he used Tony Campolo's words,  
"It's Friday but Sunday's coming!"  
This colors our waiting every year.  
And because Saturday feels like normal  
we might skip over the significance of holy waiting

to our own detriment.

I'm not sure the disciples  
on that first Holy Saturday  
knew they were waiting.  
I think they may have thought  
that it was over.



The gospels don't tell us  
what happened between Friday and Sunday.  
But we can guess that they grieved heavily.  
And we know at least one thing:  
there is a small detail,  
that I have consistently missed,  
in the very first lines in our scripture passage—on that is read just  
about every year on the Sunday after Easter  
—church historian and theologian  
Diana Butler Bass points it out.

The first lines of this story from John this morning are,  
“Later that evening, on the same day,  
the disciples were locked inside  
for fear of the Jews.”

We've heard sermons before on this.

Especially the fear part.

I've probably preached a few myself.

But Diana Butler Bass notes something behind those words:  
something that she'd never pondered before  
in the story.

Namely, that after the horror and pain of Friday  
the disciples made their way  
back to where they felt comfort, safety, and love.  
They went back to the house

where they had met.<sup>2</sup>

They didn't return to lake or shore

—that comes later in the story.

They didn't go back to Golgotha,  
the place they last saw Jesus.

Most of them didn't even go to the cemetery

—only the women were brave enough for that

...but that's a different sermon

altogether.

Instead, the disciples went back to house,  
to the table,

the place where they'd shared  
that last meal and had their feet washed.

That's where they waited.

I think it's a good guess that

the disciples spent Holy Saturday  
around that table.

Wringing their hands and drying their tears.

They spent time around that table

trying to make sense of what seemed impossible.

It is true, the story tells us they were scared

and had locked themselves inside

and I can't say I blame them.

I'd have been scared too.

But in their fear, they return to

the places where they experienced

that perfect goodness and love.

They return to the house and table.

And on that first morning,

when Mary and the others

—depending on which gospel you read—

when she came back

saying that Jesus had been raised—

don't you picture her

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<sup>2</sup> <https://dianabutlerbass.substack.com/p/the-holy-thursday-revolution?s=r>

bursting into the house,  
to find the disciples  
looking bleary eyed with exhaustion,  
sipping their morning coffee  
around the table?

Bass writes, "In the wake of Jesus' execution  
and the strange reports  
from Mary Magdalene of Jesus in the garden,  
the frightened disciples had gone back  
to the upper room.  
Perhaps to grieve,  
perhaps to remember,  
perhaps to await what they thought  
would be their own arrest.  
But they had gone back to the room with the table,  
their last gathering place."<sup>3</sup>



Perhaps it should not be lost on us,  
that here we are again in this place.  
I know not all of us are here,  
some of us are on a vacation or break,  
some of us worshipping  
under the great cathedral of the sky  
on a beautiful day like today.  
But hopefully most of us  
will return here in the coming days and weeks.

Because this is just one place  
of that Holy Saturday of waiting.

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<sup>3</sup> ibid

‘It is a Christian waiting we call hope.  
It is an active waiting.  
Holy Saturday waiting  
is active waiting  
that knows that even in the worst situations,  
even in the darkest times,  
our God is still powerfully at work.  
Even when we can’t see it  
[because of fear, anger, pain, or grief]  
even when we can’t see God at work  
clearly in the moment.’<sup>4</sup>

So, when we as members  
of the Christian family wait,  
when we ponder what Good Friday teaches us  
and what Easter Sunday promises us,  
I think we find that  
we spend most of our lives  
waiting and living  
in that active hope,  
which brings us back  
to this house  
and this table.

The cross teaches us much  
and reveals our worst.  
The empty tomb promises us life  
and reveals God’s best.

But the table in our house  
sustains our everyday  
—the days we live in between Good Friday and Easter Sunday  
—the table of hope,  
the table of waiting,  
the table of Holy Saturday.

Because we know the story,  
the table, the house of God  
is not a bad place

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<sup>4</sup> Father James Martin, S.J.

for Jesus to find us and say,  
“Peace be with you.”