

There is a space of rest, a space of Sabbath between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Jesus' disciples observe this Jewish sabbath; I think it must have been welcome, this time when they had to do nothing. They would have been in shock, traumatised by the death of their teacher, Jesus. They would have just that Sabbath time to try to envision what the future held; to begin to mourn the end of the hope they had found in following Christ.

On Good Friday, we noted that the Roman and Temple authorities thought that killing Jesus would return things to normal; but that the signs surrounding Jesus' death - the sun going dark, the curtain of the Temple being torn in two - clearly showed that *normal* was not *right*. God incarnate in the life of Jesus was about ushering in a new way of life that was right, just, and equitable, not about maintaining an unjust normal. We read about the Exodus on the Easter Vigil; and I always remember that in the wilderness, the freed Israelites began to long for the days of their enslavement. When they were enslaved, they knew what to expect from day to day, they knew what they would have to eat, where they would sleep. Slavery, for all its brutality, was normal; and the wandering Israelites

wanted to go back to normal. The promised land was too hard to attain, too far away, too impossible.

The authorities who killed Jesus feared loss of power and so used death as a weapon to maintain that power. They wanted to return to the normal that existed before Jesus was teaching about the law of love in the Temple; the disciples had all fled after Jesus' arrest, and in that Sabbath time, I have to think that they considered returning to normal, too. They considered forgetting all about Jesus and the seemingly false hopes he had raised in them, the hope for a new kingdom of God where the human family no longer abused and obscured the divine image in which we are made. The disciples, on that Sabbath between Good Friday and Easter Sunday had to be exhausted; anything normal and predictable would have seemed enticing, even if it was unjust.

But God, as God does, responds with something that the apostle Paul will call foolishness, an act worthy of ridicule, a gesture that should not be believable. God incarnate in Jesus lives beyond death. God incarnate in Jesus proves that the love of God is stronger than death and defeats it. God incarnate in Jesus proves that all the earthly power wielded by the

Romans and the Temple authorities is no power at all, but simply an act of fear, and of a lack of faith in the love of God. God longed to restore and renew us in relationship with our Creator; God became human and alive beyond death to keep open that Way of redemption that Jesus showed in his life and teaching. Jesus the Christ submitted himself to the false powers of earthly authority and rose to glorify the true power of God's love. Arrest, beating, torture, death on the cross; God looked at us through Jesus' eyes and saw in us, every one of us, the divine image worth enduring the worst humanity could offer. Because God looked at us through Jesus' eyes and saw in us, every one of us, the divine image in which we were created, that God called, "very good", and that did not belong to death and the grave.

So after the Sabbath rest, the women disciples go in mourning to the tomb, prepared to care for Jesus' body as one beloved. They find that God has cared for Jesus as one beloved and has raised his body from the grave. The tomb is empty. The breadth, depth, and height of God's love is truly terrifying; the women certainly felt it. God went so far to invite us back into relationship, God went beyond death to renew and restore us as God's children; God incarnate could not be contained by death or a tomb. God

would not let anything return to normal, and such a display of divine love demands of us a response in that same love.

Jesus has gone ahead of us; Jesus still calls us to the work begun in his earthly ministry; it may seem too hard to attain, God's kingdom of justice and peace; it may seem impossible, or even foolish; and we are exhausted. But the tomb is empty; the kingdom has come near, but is not yet accomplished. Jesus' resurrection demands that we not go back to the normal, but go forward into the new. The kingdom will only come on earth when we follow Christ in a love that seeks the redemption of all creation; and by God's grace, the strength of that love which reached beyond death is alive in us, renewing us to live this Good News so that the world is changed. Leave behind the works of death and of darkness. Love as God loves; do justice as God in Christ did justice; walk in hope and do not fear, for Jesus, whom you were looking for, is risen and has gone ahead of you. Alleluia! Amen.