

Good Friday 2022  
 Evil all Around  
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In the name of God, Amen.

*“And so, because it was the Jewish day of preparation, the eve of the Sabbath and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.”*

What if...what if that was it? What if there was nothing more than the tomb? What if Christ's life ended with the grave?

When I was in third grade, my family was living in Hawaii. One of our favorite family pastimes was to rent, for cheap, broken-down cottages by the ocean at the end of a deserted airfield at Bellows Air Force base.

One particular trip, over a weekend, my parents decided that we should hit the Saturday night mass. So off we went to an unfamiliar church, a tiny structure down the end of a winding country road, situated on the edge of a poor town nestled against the base of the mountains. While I don't remember the inside of the church, I do remember the better part of the sermon. I might add, it is one of two sermons I remember from my childhood. It was a sermon on evil; it was about the devil and how the devil is present and lurking all around absolutely everywhere. It was a sermon that shook my inner core, for suddenly the world was no longer benign. Suddenly much of what I trusted to be true about my world felt tenuous and I felt exposed and vulnerable.

Later on that evening, when we were back at our ramshackle cottage, as was our custom, all of us kids went out to play hide and seek on the beach. I remember it was a cloudy, windy, moonless night. I remember lying on the sand, hiding in the shadow of an old life guard stand, and looking up and feeling as if the dark sky was pressing down on top of me, smothering me like a huge black weight. I remember I suddenly had no interest in the game—who won, who lost, who got found—because suddenly it seemed to my 9 year old eyes that the devil—evil—was all around me lurking and lingering in all the shadows. I remember yelling, “I quit,” and running as fast as I could to the light on our cottage porch.

I remember my mom saying, “Bonnie, its not time to come in yet.”

I said, “That's OK, I don't feel like playing anymore.”

My mom asked, “Bonnie, what's wrong?”

“Nothing.”

“Bonnie, you never leave a game early. What's wrong? Did you hurt yourself?”

“No.”

So finally after several more patient queries, I admitted that I was scared, afraid of, the devil all around.

That night, it was if suddenly, the tomb was all there was.

Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever had a sense that it's just the tomb and no more? (*Lately?*) Have you ever had an abiding sense of despair? A feeling that a formless fog somewhere off to the corner of your eye is moving closer to your life. When it comes, you'll be enshrouded, enmeshed, no part of you untouched by its dampness? It's at times like those that it feels as if Good Friday is where Christ's life ends.

*"But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear and at once, blood and water came out."*

Good Friday the end.

It is on this day, this night, and the following day that we contemplate what our lives might be like if the tomb was indeed the end. If all that was left of Jesus were decayed bones on a slab of stone. If Christ's story ended at the tomb, then evil would be everywhere. If the tomb was the end, then our hopes would be unfounded, our longings trivial, our passions in vain, and the fog of despair would have a permanent place in our lives. If nothing happened after the tomb, well then, those good people whom we see in our icons would have buried an innocent man and wandered off into oblivion. And we, my friends, would not be here. This community would not exist if Good Friday was the end of what was written of Jesus of Nazareth.

We know, sometimes in our hearts, sometimes in our head, we know that Good Friday was not THE END. That, as sure as the cross was nailed, the stone was rolled, the sadness, the pain we may feel in our lives is not the end.

That night at the beach, my mom took me inside and asked me what I was afraid of. I told her. I said I was afraid of the devil. She said, "Well then let's pray." We began with an *Act of Contrition*, followed by an *Our Father* and a *Hail Mary*. (We were Catholic.) And then she held me tight. No longer did the fog of fear enshroud me, but rather the secure presence of abiding love enveloped me. I knew in that moment I was not, we are not alone. My mom's gracious, tenacious love, embodied Christ's steadfast presence.

Today, now, and the hours to come, I invite you to meditate on Christ's tomb, asking the question, "What would our lives be like if Christ's story stopped at the grave?"

Knowing all the while that after those two dark nights there came an Easter Morning.

Amen.