

irrelevant, dead, in a tomb, at the end of the road. Leaders have been found guilty of child sexual abuse or failing to protect the victims. The church occupies a marginal position in Australian society, a place Jesus of Nazareth often inhabited when he ate with tax-collectors and sinners (Luke 7:34), had no place to lay his head (Matthew 11:19) and was crucified outside a city. Christians who gather each week for worship know failure and shame, and sometimes find it difficult to reach out to unpopular needy neighbours or are reluctant to protest against social injustices.

If we are willing to spend time resting in the tomb with Jesus' dead body, we shall notice something is happening. The love of God is painfully and gently rolling back the stone of our shame and guilt, and raising us *through* death to life. By looking both ways, towards Good Friday and Easter Day, from an in-between Holy Saturday place, and finding Jesus in both, things start to make sense. Amazingly, God accepts and chooses to use evil and death in God's work of forgiveness, redemption and resurrection. Only when we are in places of shame, guilt, suffering, despair, foolishness, failure or terror can we, with Jesus, experience the power of God's love, healing and raising us to new life.

When we hold together the horror of Good Friday and the joy of Easter Day, we are in an in-between liminal place of change, able to share God's love with those both inside and outside the church who have come to the end of the road. Together we can walk on in hope and find new life in Christ.

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Holy Saturday

The End of the Road, or an In-between Place



“Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.” (John 19:41-42, NRSV)

Places and the boundaries or edges which define them are important. Today travellers wanting to enter a country must stop at its border crossing. We in Australia, as an island nation, have the choice of turning back the boats of asylum seekers approaching our coastal border, or providing a bridge of compassion for those fleeing from terror. In some continents one can stand in two countries at once, straddling a border. You are then in a liminal in-between place. Of course, if the boundary is a high wall or locked gate, this is impossible! The border becomes a barrier and you are

stuck on one side. It is the end of the road for you if you cannot go back and cannot move forwards.

The few disciples who watched Jesus hanging on the cross on Good Friday, heard his cry of desolation and saw him die. They had enthusiastically followed their leader along the roads of Palestine expecting a great future, but now he was dead. They were at the end of the road. They stumbled away, grieving and despairing.

For Judas and Peter, Jesus' death on the cross was a barrier of shame and guilt they were unable to traverse. Judas betrayed Jesus and in despair he killed himself. For him it was the only option. Peter denied knowing Jesus, but, in spite of his shame and aware that he had let down his friends, he sought support from them. The disciples who had fled in fear in the garden, huddled together in their guilt and grief. They were all at the end of the road.

Surprisingly, one man, Joseph of Arimathea, still found room to move. Although not a relative, he dared to approach Pilate and ask for the dead body of Jesus. Joseph and his friend Nicodemus were not close disciples of Jesus, but secret followers lurking on the edges. They decided to save Jesus' body from being torn to pieces by vultures and give it the respect and reverence they thought was right. They washed the body, covered it with myrrh and aloes and wrapped it in linen cloths before placing it in a tomb, secured with a stone. What they did could be judged pointless and risky, publicly identifying them with a failed seditious movement. Then they, too, came to the end of the

road. The Sabbath was about to begin.

There can be times in our lives when we feel that our burden of shame, guilt, terror or grief is so great, we just want to hide. We come to the end of the road. We might say that we come to a Holy Saturday place.

Each Sunday we recite in the creed, "...he suffered death and was buried." There is a certain finality with the words "and was buried". They end with a full stop. They come between words describing Jesus' death and those announcing his resurrection. We are invited to pause and reflect on this Sabbath day, at the end of the road, in an edgy liminal space in-between Good Friday and Easter Day.

God is dead, interred in a tomb. This is what the incarnation means. God became a human being and experienced all that we experience. We now know that there is nowhere in life or death that God is not present.

The end of the road, which seems so final, can become a liminal place for us as individuals and for us as members of the church. Holy Saturday is an in-between mysterious place, often uncomfortable and unstable, where the presence of God's merciful all-embracing love brings the possibility of new life through death for both victims and perpetrators. The love that drove Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus to place the body of Jesus in a tomb, two days later enabled the women to visit the tomb to anoint Jesus' body, and unexpectedly to be witnesses of his resurrection. The accepting love offered to Peter gave him life.

Today the church in Australia, the body of Christ, can look