

Matthew 27:57-66
"Sharing in God's Rest"
Easter Vigil (Holy Saturday)

April 8, 2023
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, West Salem, Wisc.
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

"On the seventh day God finished His work that He had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all His work that He had done" (Genesis 2:2-3).

It was a Friday when God finished His work of creation. It was a Saturday when He rested from all His labors.

God's people were also reminded of God's rest and were summoned to enter that rest with a day without toil by giving thanks to Him in worship and prayer.

Yesterday, Jesus finished His work. He cried out before His death: ***"It is finished."*** The One through whom all things were made had come into human flesh to restore His creation. Having wrought redemption by His suffering on the cross, He announced His work complete and finished. He then slept in death.

His body was quickly taken by Joseph and Nicodemus to Joseph's tomb, and before the sun set His body was laid to rest. As the sun set that Friday, Sabbath began. Even as God had rested from creating and blessed and hallowed the Sabbath rest, so God in our flesh rested from His labors of salvation. He rested in a tomb.

While the Son of God was resting in the tomb, the chief priests and the Pharisees were not resting. They were gathered before the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate in great fear. They said to Pilate, ***"Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.' Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lets his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first"*** (Matthew 27:63-64).

After all the Sanhedrin had witnessed and heard Jesus do, is this what they were really afraid of? Were they afraid that Jesus who had healed the sick and raised the dead would have His disciples steal His body to make it look like He resurrected? What would that prove? A missing body proves nothing.

Or did they actually come to believe that Jesus could very well be the Messiah? Could it be that they feared God's wrath and thought that by sealing the tomb that they would be protected from God?

We don't know. But while they should have been resting in God's Word, they were scheming. They were frightened. This we know for sure.

While all that was happening, Jesus was at rest, but His rest was only temporary. Maybe the Sanhedrin were right to be scared. However, while He was at rest, Jesus was sanctifying our graves, our burial sites. Even the graves of those who sent Him to death. He was preparing to make every one of them as temporary as His own. As He laid down and slept in death, Jesus would arise to a life that was forever beyond the grave, so that He would teach us to go to our graves as to a little rest, a little Sabbath.

Our bodies will sleep there for a time, but on the Last Day Jesus will stand upon the earth with the sound of a trumpet blast. We shall rise and be glorified in our bodies forever.

Christ's temporary rest in the tomb opens up to us a new way for His baptized children to look at that hole in the ground. It has been made holy by His presence there. There is nothing we go through that He does not know, even the darkness of the grave closing us in.

Yet, as it did not and could not hold Him, neither shall the darkness of death hold us. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +