

**GOOD FRIDAY**  
**Mark 15:40-47**

There is a church in town where they say to one another “take off your bib and put on your apron’. They say it so much that they have actually started giving new members an apron during a welcome ceremony. It has become something akin to putting on a stole at an ordination, --a call to ministry and a sign of office. They are saying “put away childish things when you come here and take on the work that we are given to do in service to a hurting and broken world.” They are saying “Grow up and get busy.” That is the way to authentic and attractive community. That is the way to the community of Jesus.

Work in the kitchen has often been something that goes on behind the scenes—down stairs at Downton Abbey; out back with no men allowed in traditional, rural, Western Tanzania—servants’ work, without prestige, sometimes discomfiting, often hard duty at unsociable hours. Not unlike the work that surrounds a burial with its cleaning and dressing, anointing and embalming. Of course there were “women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee.” Of course they were there, watching, waiting, behind the scenes in many ways, but present nonetheless.

They are not outsiders among Jesus' band of followers, but every one of those followers is by choice, or more often by circumstance, outside the bounds --or at least on the margins-- of civilized society. And they were not alone in their watching and waiting either. For Joseph of Arimethea had also put on his apron and marched in to see Pilate, the Roman Procurator, --marched in "boldly" we are told. For a moment I had a picture of him his sleeves rolled up, arms covered in baking flour, carrying a rolling pin perhaps and certainly wearing his apron. He was on the margins too because he was "waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God. We don't know the content of his expectation or his hope. But we know that he responded in some deep way to Jesus and he asked for his body.

Mark wants us to know that there is not trickery here, --that Jesus really and truly died, certified by the Roman authorities. Whatever is to follow cannot be some magic trick or illusion, a rumor started by imprecise or disheartened disciples. Mark wants to be clear that Jesus really and truly died. Life ended rather than interrupted. What the women were facing and what Joseph was facing and in time what every disciple including every one of us must face: the reality of Jesus' death. At this point in the story life is over. Death, by every measure, has the last word and the victory. In the face of death the women and Joseph of Arimethea roll up their

sleeves, don their metaphorical aprons, and go to work. Joseph “bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud, and laid him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a stone against the door of the tomb,” all this witnessed by the women.

Mark, you recall, does not tell any story of Jesus’ birth, and will tell no stories of his appearing in the resurrection. A later disciple who presumably just couldn’t stand the ambiguity of that chose to add some appearance stories much later. But Mark doesn’t dress things up for us. Jesus appeared in the world, a prophet and more than a prophet. He taught and healed and ended in inevitable conflict with the religious authorities. He became the quintessential victim of human anxiety and the sin that ensues from that. He was executed in one of the vilest ways we have yet devised for the killing of a prisoner. And some followers laid him in a tomb. But we have the benefit of other, later versions of the story. Writing twenty or thirty years after Mark, but drawing heavily on Mark in many ways, albeit for distinctive purposes, both Matthew and Luke tell stories of Jesus birth, shaped in part we presume by Mark’s story of his death. Because of that, this ending of the story of this dreadful day which I still have a hard time calling “good”, --Mark’s account of the burial becomes a clue for us, a hint of light appearing on the horizon.

Here is what I mean. Can you think of another story where Jesus is in something like a cave hewn from rock? He was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid, not in a tomb, but in a manger. For those of us who come later than Mark's first readers or hearers, the story of Jesus' burial is a clue that some kind of new life is to follow.

Those apron clad women, Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Joses, are not merely mourners, but also midwives at the dawn of a new age, a new creation, a new world order in which death will not be the last word. The last word will become love, -- the very love in which they partake and which they have demonstrated by following Jesus even to seeing where he was laid.

We must wait for that new world to be made manifest. We must wait for the time of celebration and even then we must wait for the full manifestation of the reign of God on earth. In the meantime we can take off our bibs, put away childish things, don an apron, and face death as sober grown ups who even now can taste the first fruits of a banquet yet to come in every act of love and care that we are blessed to give or to receive. It is by our service, just like

the service of the women and of Joseph, that the world will know that in the end and even now, Love is stronger than Death.