

## Uncertain Saturday

April 30, 2023

I clearly remember August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1965. The night before my father had collapsed from a heart attack on the kitchen floor of our home. No amount of prayer or medical attention could reverse the reality of what had happened. On August 19<sup>th</sup> I awoke to a new reality and all the confusion, fear and uncertainty that came with it.

August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1965 might be the closest association that I have with the experience of Jesus' friends and disciples who awoke on the Saturday following that first Good Friday. They had loved Jesus. Many had devoted their lives to him, abandoning all that they had known, so that they could follow and learn from him. They had eaten meals with him, witnessed his extraordinary acts of healing, and sat at his feet as he taught. Some had embraced him, one even washed his feet with her hair, many felt deep love for him. They had hoped for so much – it seemed that in Jesus, God had answered their prayers and that a world filled with possibility was just around the corner. But now it was Saturday morning and all that seemed to have ended with a deep sigh from a hill on Golgotha.

In the liturgical language of the church names have been given to the high and holy days of Jesus' death and resurrection. Ironically the term 'Good Friday' describes the day of crucifixion; and the name 'Easter' is given to the Sunday when his empty tomb was discovered. The day in between these two events, to my knowledge, does not have a particular descriptor. As I pondered this reality a name came to me that seemed to fit the facts and feelings of that day. I have named it 'Uncertain Saturday'.

Uncertain Saturday was filled with grief, confusion, and fear. The Bible takes note of this fear. The Gospel of John records: "When it was evening on that (Saturday) the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked (out of) fear ... " We read how this fear carried over from Saturday into the early hours of Sunday morning. The Gospel of Luke records, "The women (who went to the tomb) were terrified." The Gospel of Matthew records that despite the appearance of the resurrected Jesus, the women "fled the tomb ... for they were afraid."

Those were the feelings I experienced on August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1965. I awoke in disbelief that my father had died. I anxiously watched as my mother's grief threatened to overwhelm her. My father's presence, the stability he had brought to our home, the income upon which our family relied, was gone. Uncertainty and, yes, fear were the prevailing emotions of that "Uncertain Saturday."

I imagine that you have also experienced "Uncertain Saturdays" in your life, perhaps many of them. It seems impossible to live a life that is completely free of struggle, heartache, and fear. I recall one particular week when I was pastor at St. Martin's and three separate parishioners came to see me with their own "Uncertain Saturday" experiences. One found herself in a welfare office applying for social assistance after being abandoned by her husband. One found himself in a health clinic requesting a test for AIDS after discovering that one of his partner's had been diagnosed with the illness. Still another was mute and dazed after an appointment at the Cancer Clinic where she learned that the lump in her breast was malignant. Sometimes the feelings of "Uncertain Saturdays" occur from less personal but equally challenging events. I think of our Indigenous neighbours whose uncertain Saturdays

lasted for generations as they watched at first their land, and then their children, taken from them.

When I look at our neighbours in the United States it appears to me that the Uncertain Saturday of pandemic pressures and changing global realities have created fear and anger in their nation. As blue collar workers lose jobs to the global economy, and the disparity between the rich and the working class deepens many have become fearful and angry looking for someone to blame. They direct their anger on their black neighbours, on new immigrants and even upon women seeking reproductive security. They want to return to a time that no longer exists. In our own lives we have met people who seem to have never moved beyond the angst of Uncertain Saturdays choosing to live smaller lives, rigid in their outlook and critical of those who have found new life.

I wonder what the friends of Jesus were thinking amidst the feelings of their Uncertain Saturday. Perhaps some were planning an escape, lest the powers that arrested Jesus were to now pursue them. Perhaps some were pondering a return to their old way of life on a fishing boat. Perhaps some, so overwrought with grief, simply couldn't think about what was next. It is unlikely that any of them could have imagined the events described in today's reading from the Book of Acts.

Within months or, perhaps even weeks, this same group of friends had discovered hope, purpose, and possibility. It is such an amazing witness that it warrants reading every Easter season. Listen again to their testimony:

All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts.

It appears that we have a choice on the Uncertain Saturdays of our lives. We can become stuck in the struggle, cower in fear, or seethe with anger or we can learn from Jesus' friends and prepare ourselves for resurrection. There is a choice at the end of Uncertain Saturdays. One need not retreat to the fear and anger engendered by Good Friday struggles. Resurrection is possible. Opening to Spirit, sharing our resources, breaking bread together can usher us from the uncertainty of Saturday to the possibilities of Easter Sunday.

In the days that followed August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1965 my mother and I were supported by our extended family and I found a warm welcome within the Christian community. Although Mom never embraced the church community, she often testified that the only way she got through those days was because God was at her side. Despite having lived as a shy and introverted homemaker she found her way into the workforce where she met new friends and expanded her view of the world. She found a purpose that enabled her to hope again. Although we would have given anything to have Dad revived on that difficult August evening, we experienced resurrection as we moved beyond Uncertain Saturday into what life still had to offer.

As a pastor I attempted to stand beside that trio of parishioners who visited me during that one week in my St. Martin's ministry. The woman abandoned by her husband qualified for social assistance and within a year had returned to the workforce and reclaimed her inherent skills. The man was declared AIDS free and chose to pursue a more permanent relationship that has lasted over twenty years. The woman in

the Cancer Clinic endured the challenges of surgery and chemotherapy and celebrates nearly two decades cancer free. Even our Indigenous neighbours who spent years amidst the Uncertain Saturday of trauma are celebrating a resurrection as their spirituality, their art, their politics and their passion to be caretakers of the land arises in our midst.

I am not suggesting a 'polyanna' approach to the troubles that beset us. Life can be difficult. Grief and lament are legitimate responses to life's struggles. But we need not remain in those Uncertain Saturdays. Jesus' friends show us how to move from Uncertain Saturdays into resurrection. First, they recognized and cherished the life they had lived with Jesus. Sometimes struggles and Uncertain Saturdays cause us to lose sight of the blessings we have known. Jesus' friends were filled with precious memories of their relationship with him. I sometimes wonder if the resurrection accounts are as much the recalling of his presence as an appearance of his resurrected body. No where is this more evident than in the road to Emmaus story. You will remember how two of his disciples were walking to Emmaus recalling the life they had lived with him. The story suggests they met a stranger who travelled with them and was later recognized as the risen Christ. The disciples reported that their hearts were 'burning within them' as they remembered their life with Jesus. If we can touch the blessings that preceded our troubles, we can often put our troubles into perspective and find much to be thankful for in our lives.

The other wisdom that comes from Jesus' friends is that they embraced the way of life they had learned from him. In some respects it was this life, focused on personal peace, just communities and love that was resurrected in those early Christian communities. In the testimony from the book of Acts we read how they enacted the lifestyle Jesus taught by praying together, sharing their possessions, and looking out for those in need. When we are clear about our purpose, we can find our way beyond uncertainty. Indigenous Elders never sacrificed their spirituality or their commitment to the land. The resurrection that we are witnessing in their communities is a direct result of a prevailing wisdom that they never relinquished.

The final thing that I learn from the way Jesus' friends moved from Good Friday despair, through Uncertain Saturday, to resurrection is that they did it together. The book of Acts tells us that they shared things in common, they worshiped together and that they broke bread together. The 'Good Life Project', a Harvard University study that followed over 700 people from age 19 through to old age discovered that it is relationships that sustain us. They discovered that regardless of wealth or status the most significant factor contributing to physical well-being, mental acuity and overall life satisfaction was having family, friends and communities who we invest in and who invest in us. Church is a legacy of those early Christian communities and when churches are able to remember Jesus and enact his mission, they contribute to full lives that can withstand and move us beyond Uncertain Saturdays.

In this Easter time of the church we tell and re-tell the stories of the empty tomb, the experience of the risen Christ, and of his followers resurrection from grief and despair. If only we had been there; but; God has given us the Spirit of resurrection that moves us beyond our own struggles into new lives shaped and informed by the Way of Jesus. Thanks be to God. Amen.

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