

Tenebrae Tomb of Triumph

Darkening Shadows of the Future

Relentless Series: Tenebrae
Holy Week - April 16th, 2022
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Genesis 22:6-14
Ecclesiastes 1:2-18
Isaiah 38:10-19
Matthew 26:36-46
John 19:38-42
Hebrews 5:7-10; 9:11-15

Sometimes I wonder why people seem to have no real concept of the gravity of the holy week. Yes, as Christians our focus is always on the resurrection, on the new hope and light that Yeshua came to shine on our world. But, I think we take a lot of what he actually did for granted. Maybe that's why so many of us seem to conduct ourselves as though we aren't forgiven or precious to God. Or that it's so easy to be forgiven and absolve ourselves of the responsibility of the conduct becoming of a Christian.

Many churches seem to skip right through from the gruesome crucifixion to the celebration after his rise. Many churches don't even really preach about what it means for him to have gone into the grave, what experience he may have had in that three days between. But it's not just him.

We understand his entire story because of the gospel accounts written by his closest followers, the Disciples. So let's take a moment to slip inside the story, post crucifixion in the suspension of time between the cross and the rising Son...

If you wish to fully honour the Rite of the Tenebrae then collect 14 candles. Light one with a Prayer for Yeshua. Then light each of the others from that one flame. Each for one of the apostles, and the final for his mother, Mary. Then, with each reading of the stations, extinguish one of the candles before moving on to the next station, leaving his to last.

When I was younger, one of my favourite times in the entire church calendar was the Tenebrae. My church only did it the one year that I remember. It was a solemn and sombre occasion, the service was very simple as the pastor read through the 14 Stations of the Cross. A candelabra across the front of the altar held 14 candles. And with each passage noting each stage of Yeshua's journey from conviction to crucifixion, with each acknowledgement of the gravity of that phase of his journey, with a deeper understanding of what depths of meaning held within those simple acts each light was extinguished until we were left in the dark the only light remaining was the sunset glimmer through the stained glass windows depicting the Passion.

The reverent intimacy of that ceremony stuck with me. The Tenebrae service is a proper funeral that honours the loss of our leader and teacher. Although we know how the story ends, I feel like it lands in a different way when we are present to the different parts of it. When we truly honour every element of what it took to accomplish the end goals. When we are exposed to the richness of the teaching of what the cross and the resurrection really mean it brings new life into your faith and how you walk as the embodiment of what he taught.

Tenebrae means darkness in Latin.

I think by only keeping our eyes on the light at the end of the tunnel
we forget the entrance to that tunnel
was the mouth of a cave
that served as the tomb
for the one who died for us.

Humans are great at keeping ourselves distracted. If we keep ourselves busy enough then we can just keep moving and not get overwhelmed with emotion, and maybe even escape some of our responsibilities. We do this consciously and passively. And as practitioners of the faith, I think when we glaze over the gravity of the season we inadvertently are doing just that.

I invite you to see what changes when you actually sit with the understanding from the perspective of an apostle who just lost their leader, as a Hebrew who just lost their hope. One of the big mistakes that many people make when they lose something, whether

it's a loved one, a relationship or even a job, is that we do not spend the time to honour our grief. Everyone has their own way of grieving, and for just three days of the year I challenge Christians to actually grieve the loss with that sacrifice on the cross. To be present to those moments as a disciple of his. You may not be a first generation disciple, but you are still his follower, right? And so just for today put your blinders on, forget about the resurrection, and understand the gravity of the fact that your leader, your lover, your best friend just laid down his life when you were the target.

Just imagine being in a situation where someone pushed you out of the way and died saving you. I know those are exactly the words that Christianity is built on, but I am convinced that many people have forgotten what that means. So make it contemporary, think of a movie or a song or a story about someone taking the hit for someone else and it costing them everything and how it moved you. Please take a moment to let the offering of that Lamb become real for you.

The first generation apostles knew the stories, but yet, although they believed in him they really thought it was over. They all knew he died, though only one of them actually watched it happen. The biblical accounts show that they were cloistered in hiding, afraid for their own lives for having been associated with him. I don't think that that is an act of abandonment, it's more that it was that they needed to rest up, resupply, reorient before they could figure out what an earth to do next. He had been clear about what he wanted of them but I think the whole thing really took them by surprise.

Their fearless leader was gone. They believed that he was divinity incarnate and partly that he may have been untouchable and he was gone so fast. Literally only a day ago they were enjoying the camaraderie of the Seder meal at Passover. They weren't prepared for the loss, it was shocking. They were disoriented. And they were overwhelmed in the grief.

They weren't hiding because they were cowards, they were sheep without a shepherd left behind by the Shepherd who expected the world of them and told them so in no uncertain terms. Their grief was very real, and by jumping from a glazed over crucifixion story to a resurrection celebration we do not honour their experiences even though our entire tradition is based on what they did next.

These are the founding fathers, the evangelist who spread the word of the good news. They were the ones that he delivered all of the insights and teachings through. The ones who preserved his tales, stories and teachings. The ones who received the Holy Spirit on the other side and built a Christian church in his name. And yet we skip the reality of their experience of grief.

So let's back the story up a bit and go through the 14 Stations of the Cross. When we put together the four gospel accounts of the Way of the Cross; that Via Delarosa, the Way of Suffering, then we start to paint a holistic picture. As a grieving believer, each one of those steps has medicine and meaning for us to be unpacked and used in our own healing and evolution.

The first station on *the Way*, the starting gate, was when Yeshua was condemned to die. It would not have mattered the method of execution, but crucifixion was as bad as it got. It was public, it was drawn out, it was humiliating, and it was torture. For those who didn't witness it, who just heard that that's what was about to happen to him. You can't imagine how that would tear you up inside before it's happened, wondering if it's your mission and responsibility to save him from it all. Hitting the floor on your knees to beg God to save him from it and to show His glory and power and prove His might by saving Yeshua like He saved the Hebrews at the original Passover from Egypt.

They're still in the mindset of the Passover, which means they are there in the town to celebrate miracles and how God can extract people from impossible situations. You can expect that every one of them hit the floor surrendered in desperate intercessory prayer pleading in petition with God. Although bartering and negotiation is not traditionally the first stage of grief, as soon as you're done having your angry rant about how unjust it is, that's exactly where you're going next.

The next station on the Way of the Cross is when he was sentenced to carry his own, which was not necessarily a usual practice. In most cases, a place like Golgotha had permanently installed crosses and the people were interchanged upon them. But the cross was already waiting there for you, built by the soldiers to ensure that it was sturdy enough for the job.

He had already been tortured through lashings and beatings at the hands of the Roman soldiers and a cross that can hold up your own weight has to weigh at least three

times as much as you do. These are huge timbers that won't break under a grown man's weight. And they're just dumped on those open wounds. It is literally insult to injury. As a disciple, you're standing there wondering how much worse it could possibly get and why this innocent man has to endure these extra features to his sentence.

The third station on the Way of the Cross is when he falls the first time. It proves that the weight of our sins is actually too much for him to bear. He's doing his best. He's trying with every ounce of his might and when that is exhausted, his sheer willpower overcomes his circumstances to keep going step after step, one foot in front of the other, dragging this burden up a hill in the desert.

But all of that was a part of his mission, and his eyes were always on God's goals and so you know that he swallows it all resolved to his position in the story as the Messiah which he always knew he was. But, the fourth station on the Way of the Cross must've been the one that broke *his* heart.

Along the Via Delarosa, he meets his mother. It is inescapable to see the look on her face. The terror and pain of what she is witnessing. He begs her to leave and not watch. He reminds her that they always knew this was coming and he willingly accepted it. This is his part and he will do it proudly. But, there is no escaping the reality of a mother's grief.

One of the strongest influencers to manipulate another person is to tell them that you are disappointed in them. With her heart wrenched out of her chest I'm sure she just told him that she is proud of him. But the heartbreak in her eyes would've told a different story, even though he wasn't the one that she was disappointed about.

The fifth station on the Way of the Cross is where his own primary teaching, how we are here to support one another and help each other carry our burdens is embodied for him. I believe this part of the journey was a small win, a small mercy for him. Because in his last hours he got to see that other people willingly or reluctantly do show up to help one another. Although not voluntarily, Simon of Cyrene is volun-told to bear the cross for him. Essentially, Yeshua was making too slow of progress and the Romans have better things to do with their day. He literally can't carry it for more than a few steps at a time before collapsing and so the Romans grab someone from the crowd and commission him

with helping share the weight so they can get on with the mission and the story that is drawing way too much attention.

The sixth station on the Way of the Cross is one of few parts of tradition that makes very little sense to me. The story is of how Saint Veronica wipes Jesus' face when she is moved by compassion by the sight of his plight. The reason why it doesn't make any sense to me is because it's not from the Bible. As legend tells this woman on the side of the road took pity on him, and in her mercy offered her handkerchief to wipe the sweat and blood from his brow. The extended version of the legend says that by wiping his face her handkerchief had the imprint of the bloodstain print of his face which was preserved much like the shroud he was buried in. I suppose the purpose of that station is to teach us to be kind when we see suffering, even when it is grotesque.

The seventh station of the cross happens where he falls the second time. Even with the help of Simon to carry the burden, the weight of that apparatus crushes two full-grown men in their prime. It goes to show just how heavy that burden was that even with support it overcomes his allies too.

The eighth station of the cross is a momentary sojourn when the women of Jerusalem weep over Yeshua. When you read this from a surface-level perspective then we think that the local women are overcome with this horrible site, the empathy of the fairer sex reacts by being overwhelmed with compassion. But if you dig a little deeper into the traditions of the Hebrew people then you realize that this is a job for women in Hebrew tradition. You could actually be a professional griever.

They're called the Wailing Women and their ministry, their purpose is to loudly wail and cry and make a big ordeal to show how grievous the loss of your loved one was. They didn't even need to know the person but they were so empathetic and compassionate that they would come to any death, any situation of loss and you could hire them. Almost like hiring a church choir for a funeral, these women would arrive in the full glory of someone in the throes of grief. Complete with ugly cries and throwing their bodies across the dead person wailing something along the lines of 'why God, why!?!' That may sound ridiculous to you, it certainly comes across as rather theatrical, but it was a way that their sensitivities we're actually of service.

For a very reserved people a lot of the time it wasn't appropriate to express your own emotions and even today many of us have trouble really tapping in and giving in. How many times in your life have either you or someone you've known been in a situation where you say 'I just can't cry but I really feel like I need to'. All these women were professional criers. They would tap into the emotion and channel it and embody it for you in a way that made it almost impossible for you to escape your own grief and evoked it within you and gave you access to it so that you could feel it to the depths of your soul, really experience it and go through that process for complete grief. They facilitated you through that process. That was their ministry and their job. And they were there showing him what the world was feeling for him.

In the ninth station of the Way of the Cross he falls the third time. He simply has nothing left. Even without the weight of the cross I doubt by now he could even carry his own weight forward. He's officially exhausted. He's done. Stripped bare, syphoned of every ounce of his strength and even his will.

At the tenth station of the Way of the Cross he is stripped of his garments too. Fulfilling the prophecy that his clothes would be won and divvied up in a bet as the soldiers gambled over the few belongings that he had. They weren't just the clothes he happen to be wearing at that moment. We're talking about a vagabond who lived out of his bag and really only had one set of clothes, maybe a shoulder bag. They were all he had and before he's even dead the vultures and jackals are already picking his bones clean, figuratively speaking.

In nothing but a game the hard-hearted, desensitized soldiers cast lots to divvy up the few possessions he had, when he wasn't even actually done with them yet. You weren't usually crucified in your underwear. Normally criminals were executed fully clothed. Considering the condition of his body at this point in the journey and everything he had endured over the last few hours his clothes could not have been worth very much and we're likely not even useable, so were not much of a prize.

As we are rounding the corner through the eleventh station of the Way of the Cross he is nailed to it. In a way, after all they had endured together, him and his cross, they were officially married as he was nailed to it they literally became one. And forevermore his name invokes the image of his executioner. The early church did not use the cross as the symbol for their faith, it was a fish because of the commission he gave

his people which was the ministry. His ministry wasn't the cross, his legacy was evangelism and hope. And yet the image of the cross and the dying man have become so entangled that we have become desensitized, seemingly to both. But alas it remains his most intimate companion in the end.

In the twelfth station along the way, finally, he dies on that cross and allows it to carry him through to the fulfilment of all of his promises, all of the prophecies, and all of the intentions that God had held since the beginning. Just for today, we need to be mindful of where we are in that story, and where we are right now is that moment where it looks like all hope is lost. Where the crucifixion extinguished the legend that he was becoming.

In the thirteenth station along the way of the cross, Yeshua is taken down from the platform of his final sermon. Even to his last words, he was misunderstood. It wasn't the Romans who mistranslated: 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' That would be understandable because they didn't really speak Aramaic. It was the Hebrews who misunderstood him thinking that he was calling out to the prophet Elijah who had been whisked away in a chariot of fire and escaped death. Which seems odd unless you've ever watched a boxing match. He was brutally beaten and so his face was swollen and bloody. His lips were probably swollen and cracked so maybe he wasn't as eloquent as he normally was. But the words he called out were a plea to God asking why God had turned away from him.

And that is where we remain in our story because by definition hell is the one place in existence that God cannot go. And so the definition of hell is the complete absence of God. God couldn't hold His son and comfort him in those moments because the whole reason he had to die was to go face that hell, to battle it out and balance the scales, and level the playing field for the rest of us. So in those moments God withdrew His presence, withdrew His spirit or else Yeshua never would have died. He would've been being sustained by the Holy Spirit. So for him to die in that moment God needed to withdraw the divinity from the man. And in that moment Yehsua was fully human dying. Period.

The final and fourteenth station on the Way of the Cross is when he is placed in the sepulcher. The darkness of the tomb.

In the Hebrew tradition, they didn't embalm. The only record in the Bible of that procedure was Jacob, Joseph and Jesus. Jacob and Joseph had an excuse, they died in

Egypt with a command to their descendants to take their body and their bones to the promised land to be buried there. So they were preserved in the Egyptian way. But there's no context for why Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea would have been compelled to embalm Yeshua. Whether it was insight or intuition, or a direct revelation that prompted them, they knew to preserve his body for his return.

In the burial rights of a Hebrew they weren't really embalmed, rather they were slathered with different aromatic resins to cover the smell. In the Bible, it translates as aloe and myrrh. And a lot of people read it like that because aloe is a healing gel. We use it to heal wounds. But as he was dead, it wouldn't really make any sense to slather his body in a moist gel to heal wounds on dead flesh that needs to dry out. Rather *aloes* in the embalming process using wood pieces that are pulverized into a powder and used as a spice. It's traditionally seen as a combination of a bunch of spices that are used to cover up the smell of a decaying body.

After the body was cleansed, the mixed spices were used to purify. Each spice played its role. It wasn't just about the smell but about the medicine that each one held. Each ingredient played its part in honouring the dead and facilitating their transition. The metaphysics of the different spices used in embalming tell us a whole other layer to the story.

In some records, the powdered aromatics that combined to create the 'aloe' mixture were of anise, cumin, cassia cinnamon, frankincense, myrrh, and sometimes cedar.

Anise is antiseptic, antimicrobial, a fungicide and used for calming anxiety, nervousness and the nervous system, as well as insomnia to give proper rest.

Cumin is antibacterial, supports digestion and expels corrupting toxins. As an extension of those qualities, it was used in exorcisms and to repel evil.

Cedar is a disinfectant, antifungal, and pest deterrent. It was long used for opening the airways and transmuting what you no longer need. It offers a reciprocal relationship as it feeds off of your byproduct and feeds you from its own. It is also one of the most used symbols for protection.

Cassia Cinnamon is antifungal, antiviral, and kills bacteria and larvae. Even the Romans burned it at funerals. In addition to protecting the body from rot, cinnamon is a stimulant and was believed to stir up the spirit and invigorate it to go on its journey. To separate body and spirit, which is also why it was widely used for astral projection and divination. It also stops bleeding and makes the blood easier to handle.

Frankincense supports the immune system, is an anti-depressant, used for skin and oral care. Spiritually it was used for freeing one from emotional pains and reaching for higher states of consciousness.

Myrrh was not only a painkiller but also a pest deterrent and its smoke was used to fumigate. It cleanses wounds, addresses reproductive health, balances blood and therefore addresses diabetes, which is your ability to receive the sweetness in life. Spiritually, it helps to open oneself up for healing as well as assisting in the healing itself, making one more receptive to the sweet joys that await.

Most people don't realize that when Yeshua died what was used on his body when he was buried was misinterpreted. We interpreted it as aloe, but it's not like aloe vera, which we use for healing. It's aloeswood, which is agarwood! - and it was mixed with myrrh. Its smell is generally bitter and is reminiscent of a warrior, which is a fitting honour for a king whose battle was psycho-spiritual. He may not have wielded a sword but his mind and words certainly were a double-edged one.

Agarwood, (which is aloeswood or eaglewood) is a fragrant dark resinous wood used as incense, much like myrrh. It is also psychoactive and used for spiritual journeys, vision quests, grounding and enlightenment - like frankincense. It is formed in the heartwood of particular trees when they become infected with a particular type of mold. Normally the heartwood is odourless, but as the infection goes through its stages the tree responds to the attack by producing a dark aromatic resin called aloes which results in a very dense, dark, resin-embedded heartwood. It is considered one of the most sacred trees in the world because of the result of this alchemy.

If agarwood dies without ever having been infected by the mold it never becomes that sacred artifact. It's a beautiful analogy for the pains that we transmute in the conscious process of healing through our own alchemy journey. Certainly for the transmuting process of the emotional alchemy done in Christ's work at each station on the Way of the Cross.

And with all 14 candles snuffed out, and that awkward suspension of disbelief when we're not sure what to feel or what to do next. In the paralyzing shock of everything we have witnessed being present to the truth within and beneath what really happened that day, we end our story with the most disturbing and shocking part of the whole thing. For

the final act of the Tenebrae is to close out all light and really set us in the full darkness of his death with the closing of the tomb... {*the loud bang}

[Soli Deo Gloria, *Selah*]