

The “In-Between”

From Good Friday to Easter Sunday

Holy Saturday - between promise and fulfillment.

I’ve been thinking about that odd and often uncomfortable gap between the Good Friday trial, crucifixion, death, and entombment of Jesus, and the discovery of the empty tomb and the risen Christ on Easter Sunday.

Both are, of course, literary constructions—compressed tellings of what were likely longer, more complex sequences of events. But no part of the narrative resolves the awkwardness of that in-between Saturday. It remains. It lingers.

It feels, in some ways, like watching a groom on his wedding day as the bride comes down the aisle—he doesn’t quite know what to do with his hands. There is a similar sense of uncertainty within the Church itself. Some traditions include the phrase that Jesus “descended to hell,” or “to the dead.” Others do not. And in that difference, the question quietly persists:

What was Jesus up to during the in-between?

The Christian liturgical calendar doesn’t offer much guidance. In some communities, there is an Easter Vigil—a kind of devotional duty roster, where participants keep a continuous chain of prayer from the close of Good Friday to the first light of Easter morning. More often, though, the day becomes a time of preparation—egg hunts, shared meals, the quiet logistics of celebration.

And perhaps most curiously, it is a day in which we participate in a kind of practiced drama—trying to remain focused on the act of extreme sacrifice we witnessed on Friday, while pretending that we do not already know what Sunday will bring.

I remember an Easter like that.

I was serving with a signal battalion in Germany. We spent a great deal of time “in the woods,” training for our Cold War mission—operating a command-and-control communications network stretching from the North Sea to the Swiss border. Major holidays didn’t pause the exercise. They simply occurred within it.

That year, we held an Easter service in the mess tent. Nothing unusual there. At one point, while we were singing a familiar Easter hymn, I looked around at the faces of the soldiers gathered there. My eyes landed on a young officer I knew to be Jewish—singing with gusto.

After the service, I asked him what had brought him there, given that we had just been celebrating the resurrection of a Messiah his faith had not acknowledged.

His answer wasn't theological. It wasn't even particularly reflective.

"It's where the action was."

A few years later, I learned that he had converted to Christianity. And looking back, it seems to me now that on that Easter morning, he may have been standing in his own kind of in-between.

At the time, I assumed the "action" was Easter—the empty tomb, the risen Christ, the moment of proclamation. But I have come to wonder if the deeper action was somewhere else entirely.

If, as some traditions hold, this is the day Christ descended to the dead—entering fully into the place of loss, silence, and finality—then this is not an empty day at all. It is the day in which death itself is confronted. Not yet overturned in proclamation, but engaged.

Contested.

Which suggests something we do not often say out loud:

Hope does not begin on Sunday morning.

It begins here.

It begins in the in-between—where the work is being done, even when it cannot yet be seen. Where something decisive may already have occurred, but has not yet been revealed.

And that begins to sound less like a gap in the story, and more like the shape of our lives.

Because we do not live most of our days at the empty tomb.

We live here.

Between what has been accomplished and what has not yet been made visible. Between promise and fulfillment. Between loss that is real and hope that is not yet confirmed.

Our "in-between," then, is not empty time. It is the life we are given to live.

It is where we learn what it means to belong to God—not by certainty, but by trust. Not by proof, but by hope.

And perhaps that is the quiet truth of this forgotten day:

That while Easter proclaims what is true,
it is in the in-between that we learn how to live it.