

Sadie (4-y-o): Robin. Robin. Robin. Robin.

Robin (44-y-o): Yes, Sadie?

Sadie (44-y-o): Robin, only three more sleeps until South Carolina!

Sadie, Millie, Gus and their dads were leaving for a Spring Break trip to South Carolina on a Friday and I was talking with Sadie on a Tuesday and so it was that there were just three more sleeps before the much anticipated family beach vacation.

What a great way to think about something we're excited about . . . only however many more sleeps before . . . your day off, or the grandkids come, or Bahle Farms opens, or you leave for that river cruise, or the school year is done, or your Social Security check comes, or you get that new car you've been wanting, or you go away for a ladies weekend with friends. Counting down the number of sleeps between now and that thing you're looking forward to is a great way to process the anticipation.

This "however-many-more-sleeps-before" approach to living is a fun way to channel excitement. But, maybe it's also a constructive way to cope with an upcoming event for which you are less than eager, perhaps even something you are dreading. Only two more sleeps until my surgery will be over with. Only twenty more sleeps until my court date will be in the past. Only four more sleeps until I'll know if I get to keep my job after the merger. Only three more sleeps until the funeral will finally be done.

Though all of these things are hard and waiting is usually challenging to endure, the struggle is made a little bit easier when the wondering and waiting are contained within a known time frame. Time frames can be broken down into more endurable units. Time frames can often be controlled and manipulated. Time frames give us the opportunity to track our progress in the midst of an anxious time—waking up in the morning knowing there are now only three more sleeps left instead of four more sleeps left feels like a step forward. Time frames usually help—no matter what the situation.

But, when there is nothing to frame the time . . . When there is no foreseeable end to the wondering and the waiting . . . When there is an absence of schedules, appointment times, and meeting dates . . . When it's hard to get any sleeps at all because your nights are full of insomnia born of worry and fear . . . When the phone doesn't ring and the text tone doesn't ding and you feel like you're starring in that movie *Groundhog Day* living the same tedium and anxiety day after day after day with no end in sight . . . That, my friends, as any of you who have been through it know, can be a living hell.

That is the waiting and the wondering of this coming Saturday—of Holy Saturday. Holy Saturday is that day between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. For many of us it's a Saturday spent like most other Saturdays—running errands, cleaning the house, taking a hike, watching a film. Perhaps there is a bit more stress on Holy Saturday than on other Saturdays—the lines at Meijer are longer with people buying their last minute Easter dinner supplies, children are fueled by Peeps and the promise of a visit from the Easter Bunny the next day, ministers are . . . well, let me just give you tip, don't spend any time with a minister on Holy Saturday. Nothing good can come of that for either of you. But still, for all of us, Holy Saturday is a day with twenty-four hours from beginning to end and we set our alarms that night, with only more sleep to go before the celebrations of Easter the next day.

But for Jesus' disciples and friends, for the folks who had given up everything to follow him into Jerusalem the Sunday before to the shouts of the crowds yelling "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" . . . to those same disciples and friends who then heard some of those same people yelling "Crucify him! Crucify him!" just days later . . . to those same disciples and friends who were trying to find a way to breathe in the midst of their guilt at their betraying and deserting their friend . . . their misery had no time frame. Grief

doesn't abide to a schedule. They weren't even sure that the sun would rise the next morning so deep and devastating was their sense of loss and grief.

Of Holy Saturday “Walter Brueggemann writes that we don't pause on the Saturday between Good Friday and Easter because we already know the end. But that moment, the moment of Holy Saturday . . . is that important moment in which you're living beyond a death, a kind of metaphorical death, but can't see life clearly ahead.”¹

Surely this was the moment in which the disciples found themselves on that first Holy Saturday.

“People who experience trauma[s] like it describe it as] something like a descent into hell, which is a sense of survival but not living anew again.”²

The disciples knew that descent into hell after having witnessed great trauma and tragedy, I hate that some of you have, too.

Indeed, there are so many who are still in that moment now, in those dark and shadowed spaces of waiting, wondering, and wanting. Even on what to many is a festive day of loud hosannas, there are those whose voices are choked with tears. Even on what to many is a Sabbath Day of rest, there are those whose blood pounds too hard in their veins as the pressure elevates in the midst of suffering and fear, those who wonder if they'll ever be able to truly rest again. Sure, we all have the promise of Easter—at this point it's only seven more sleeps away. But the Easter that is a new spiritual reality—not the Easter that is a date on the calendar—the Easter that is a new spiritual reality—there are times of suffering during which it's impossible to count how many more sleeps until that Easter will come . . . how many more sleeps until we feel like we are alive again.

The empty cross is the symbol of that waiting and unknowing—if we see it through the eyes of Christ's disciples who looked at it on the day after their friends' body had been nailed to it, the disciples who sat beside it weeping on Holy Saturday. It's good to remember that they didn't know the whole story yet. They only have an empty cross, not an empty tomb.

I'm indebted to Australian theologian Chris Ryan for his insights on the symbolism of the empty cross for those who find themselves in what feels like a never-ending Holy Saturday.

“The empty Cross . . . tells us not to jump too quickly to resurrection, as if the Resurrection were a trump card that somehow absolves us from suffering. The Resurrection is not a divine ‘get-out-of-jail free’ card that immunizes people from pain, suffering or death. To jump too quickly to the Resurrection runs the risk of trivialising people's pain . . . For people grieving, introducing the message of the Resurrection too quickly cheapens or nullifies their sense of loss. The empty Cross reminds us that we cannot avoid suffering and death. At the same time, the empty Cross tells us that, because of Jesus' death, the meaning of pain, suffering and our own death has changed, that these are not all-crushing or definitive. The empty Cross says that the way through to resurrection must always break in from without as something new, that it cannot be taken hold of in advance of suffering or seized as a panacea to pain. In other words, the empty Cross is a sign of hope. It tells us that the new life of God surprises us, comes at a moment we cannot expect, [we don't know how many sleeps there will be before it comes] and reminds us that experiences of pain, grief and dying are suffused with the presence of Christ, the One Who was crucified and is now risen.”³

That is the good news of this day, the good news of all of our Holy Saturdays, the good news in the midst of terrible news . . . that no matter the number of sleeps lying between us and resurrection . . . the Risen Christ abides with us, knowing our pain, hearing our prayers, and loving us. Thanks be to God.

¹ <https://www.faithandleadership.com/shelly-rambo-space-between-death-and-resurrection>

² <https://www.faithandleadership.com/shelly-rambo-space-between-death-and-resurrection>

³ Chris Ryan MGL, In The Light Of The Cross: Reflections On The Australian Journey Of The World Youth Day Cross And Icon