

Scripture ~ Luke 23:44-46

⁴⁴ It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, ⁴⁵ while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last.

Reflection for Adults

On July 1, 1941, the Nazis occupied Riga, Lithuania. Four days later, every synagogue in Riga had been burned to the ground. Every synagogue except one. The Peitav Synagogue was too close to the city center, and the Nazis feared that setting it on fire would put the other city buildings in danger. So they ransacked it and converted it into a warehouse. The most central feature of the sanctuary in a synagogue is the ark where the Torah scrolls are housed. Many arks contain heavy curtains that are pushed aside during worship to reveal the scriptures they contain. Following the war, it was discovered that the eastern wall of the Peitav Synagogue, the wall where the ark was located, was a false one. Christians from the local Reformed Church had hastily erected the wall to protect the sacred scrolls. Today the synagogue is a flourishing center of Jewish life within the city.

The curtains on the ark in many synagogues recall the ones that originally hung in the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem Temple, separating the people from the inner sanctum of the sanctuary. Only the high priest was allowed to enter...and only once a year.

At this station, we arrive at the end of Luke's gospel. All hope seems lost. Then an amazing event happens. The veil in the temple is torn in two. The false wall that had been erected between God and humanity comes crushing down at the death of Jesus. Just as the scrolls that were discovered behind the wall in the Peitav Synagogue gave light to that community, so the tearing of the temple veil at the death of Jesus reveals to us the light that God has always intended for creation.

Look at the picture. Notice that you are looking from behind the veil to the cross. It's as if we were always on the inside, just waiting for God's sunrise to break upon us. Be mindful of those who still sit in the shadow of death.

Going Deeper

- Where are some places in the world where you see people "sitting in the shadow of death?" How might you rip the veil open for them?

Reflection for Children

Jesus worshipped at the Jerusalem Temple many times when he was alive. In that temple was a curtain that separated people from the Holy of Holies, the place where they believed God was present in a very special way. When Jesus died, two amazing things happened: it became very dark all throughout the city, and the curtain in the temple was torn in two. Because of Jesus'

death, we can now always be in God's presence.

Discussion with Children

- Can you think of a time when you might have been afraid of the dark?
- What did you do to help you overcome your fear?