



SERMONS THAT WORK

Easter Vigil (A)

[RCL] Psalm 114; Romans 6:3-11; Matthew 28:1-10

This Is the Night

As Christians all throughout the world gather on this night, there is a shift in time itself.

When we gather for this holy night, we pray:

This is the night, when you brought our fathers, the children of Israel, out of bondage in Egypt, and led them through the Red Sea on dry land. This is the night, when all who believe in Christ are delivered from the gloom of sin, and are restored to grace and holiness of life. This is the night, when Christ broke the bonds of death and hell, and rose victorious from the grave (Book of Common Prayer, 287).

This is the night. Like at that dawn so many generations ago, heaven and earth meet. We are given eyes to see and ears to hear the wonder of what God has done. We hear the stories of our faith and witness the God who has pursued us throughout history. God has chased us down, through desert and dry valley and flood and fire. This is the night.

And also...

This is a night that is a night among others. A night in which the faucet leaks, and the knees ache, and the baby cries. A night when the electric bill is due, and the car breaks down, and we wished there might be more people in church. A night where there is love and passion, as well as disappointment and grief.

Time stops—and time goes on. Our lives are wrapped up in eternity and unfold in the very ordinary sequence of seconds, minutes, hours, and days. The night in which heaven and earth touch is unlike any other night, and it is also just like every other night. God comes to us in our lives *as* we live them. The rules of gravity are not suspended, and also, maybe, we can feel a little lighter.

There are times when it seems that we are facing the impossible. Maybe “the impossible” is not the place where God has deserted us, but rather is the place where we know even more surely that God is with us. We are here, gathered at this altar, hearing this good news, because Christ is here. Christ is *everywhere*.

The resurrection means that God’s presence with humanity cannot be confined by anything. In Jesus, God came to be with us: a first-century, Jewish, male carpenter. But the presence of the holy is not confined to

any landscape, to any profession, to any life circumstance, to any gender. The resurrection happens within and beyond particularity. Jesus Christ, fully human and fully divine, means that God has broken every convention of time and space, in order to be with us. There is nowhere that Christ cannot go, no rupture so deep that God cannot bridge it.

This is not something we always remember. Sometimes, life is so painful, our suffering so deep, it is hard to believe that anyone has ever experienced anything as devastating.

That was certainly true for Mary Magdalene and “the other Mary.” The women in our Gospel for today went to the tomb early—to pray, maybe, to try to drill into their minds what had actually happened. Maybe they wanted to be in a place where they didn’t think God could go—maybe they were angry with God.

The women had been with Jesus from early in his ministry. They were witness to his ministry and teaching, as well as to his suffering. Maybe they just couldn’t believe what had happened, maybe they felt as half-dead with loss and grief, and so they went to be in that place of death. They didn’t expect to find anything there—it was a place of nothingness and loss: a location of absence. They went to the place where Jesus was *not*.

The angel says,

“Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples. He has been raised from the dead.”

The angel brings impossible news.

The women have come looking for Jesus, expecting to have some comfort, however cold, at being by the place where he was laid. They are hoping for a place to remember and grieve all that their friend gave them. But that is not what happens.

When the angel appears, the guards faint, but the women are steadfast. They listen and then, with fear and great joy, they go to tell the others.

And then something curious happens. On their way to Galilee—bursting with this amazing news—Jesus comes to them. It’s almost like he couldn’t wait! He is on his own way to Galilee, but before he leaves, he stops to see them one more time. They worship him, and again he tells them to share the news.

Jesus goes on to Galilee ahead of Mary and Mary Magdalene, just as he goes on ahead of all of us, into the future. Even we face that future with fear or foreboding, we are given this promise: Jesus will be there.

“Galilee” can stand for so much: Galilee is the place on the other side of the medical test, the other side of the funeral, the bankruptcy, the accident. The graduation, the birth, the wedding. Whether we meet the future with joy or grief, Jesus is there.

Jesus Christ is the anointed and beloved child of God, with us in suffering, with us in healing, and with us in joy. The one who has faced all things has gone ahead of us. The power of death had no power over him. The angel came in an earthquake to open the tomb, in order to show the women, that it was empty but Jesus was already gone before the stone was rolled away.

“Galilee” is our own future—unknowable except for one thing: Jesus is there.

Jesus is ready to welcome us into whatever future awaits us. He welcomes us, in solidarity, to every moment, every circumstance, every question that he has already endured. He welcomes us in every tear, every peal of laughter. He is walking beside us. Alleluia.

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