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St. James', Mt. Airy
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The Great Vigil of Easter
Romans 6:3-11
Psalm 114
Luke 24:1-12

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Fire and water, bread and wine: these are the primal elements of our faith, the means by which we encounter God.

Tonight as we've gathered they have been wrapped in darkness, and now light – and above all **love**.

Lent is the journey through the wilderness of the sin of our lives and the sin of the world.

Easter is the eternal event that demonstrates the love of God for all time – a power that is stronger than all other powers of the world, stronger even than death.

Love is the opposite of sin.

Sin makes us the center. Love is sacrificial and puts the needs of others first. Jesus knew this, and so the final commandment he gave to his friends the night he tenderly washed their feet and shared a final meal with them, was to love one another as he loved them.

Theologian and scientist Teilhard de Chardin wrote that the harnessing of fire is what made possible human civilization.

He went on to say that if humans ever harness the power of love, it will be the second time that humans have harnessed fire.

Tonight we began our worship with the kindling of the new fire. The sanctuary light which remains always lit year round above the aumbry, where we keep the reserve consecrated sacrament, was extinguished on Maundy Thursday. We were without light and fire until that kindling tonight, and the blessing of a new paschal candle – the light from which we lit all other lights.

It is our yearly reminder that we are called to harness the power of God's love and transform the world.

I don't mean harness as control. If death cannot control the love of God, we need not have any illusion that we may. It is not for us to parse out the love of God or to say who is worthy.

No, this resurrection night we are called once again into the work of harnessing the love of God in the spirit of using the resources we have been given to build relationships and systems in our communities which produce the energy needed to join in God's mission of justice, compassion, and reconciliation.

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The women who approached the tomb at early dawn on the first day of the week were powered by God's love.

Just as it was the women who remained with Jesus at the cross after his disciples denied him and fled, in this story from Luke it is the women who first come to the tomb. In this account they are bringing spices to anoint Christ's body, but just as surely, they simply want to continue a vigil at the tomb, as close as they could be to Jesus, to be an ongoing presence of love in the midst of the grief of his death.

They could not have been prepared in any way for what they experienced there.

Weaker people would have immediately run away, but these women, who didn't turn away from the cross, certainly didn't turn away from this either. They were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but they stayed. Their fear was outweighed by their faith – by their love.

“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.”

Remembering, they believed, and returned from the tomb to the eleven and all the rest who were hiding behind locked doors, and told all of what they had experienced.

They were not believed, their story written off as an idle tale. And yet...

And yet, I believe there must have been something in their telling that sunk into those hearts locked tight with grief.

For our Gospel ends with Peter running to the tomb to see for himself.

He is not met with messengers from God – and none of them are met with an appearance of the risen Jesus, as we find in other Gospel tellings of this astonishing morning.

What he found were empty linen wrappings and a bone-deep amazement that he took home with him.

That amazement at the impossible and unknowable mystery of the resurrection was, and is, the fire that ignites our hearts with God's love. It means that we are both bold enough, and vulnerable enough, to come out from behind the locked door of the upper rooms of our lives. And it means that we heed the call, like the women, to remember the life of Jesus, and how his love extended to all.

So, this night I say alleluia!

Alleluia for the darkness and the light!

Alleluia for the surprise of the empty tomb and the faithful women!

Alleluia for love harnessed and the world transformed.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!