

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Tonight, perhaps more than any other night, we are elemental in the way we come close to God.

Our night is marked in darkness and light, in silence and song. We kindle fire and tell stories in the dark. We splash water. We ring bells and shout Alleluia! We meet again at the table to share the bread and wine.

We do all these things, on this holiest of nights, because they help us get ready to come close to mystery of the resurrection. Because these symbols, these things that engage our senses, can lead us into *kairos* – God's time – that way in which time expands and both speeds up and slows down – in which we know we are in the presence of holy mystery, which is tonight the mystery of the resurrection.

This is important because no matter what we believe or 'know' about the resurrection in our minds, we can only really come close to the empty tomb with our senses and hearts – just like the women in our Gospel from Mark tonight.

It was love for Jesus that brought those women, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome, walking in the pre-dawn darkness, full of grief, anger and fear, toward the tomb where they knew they would find him.

Imagine the raw determination that must have brought them there – at that time of day, that time in history, in that season of unrelenting violence. It is not those who were believed to be closest to Jesus that came – Peter is not there, nor the beloved disciple – no, it was the women, the ones who in the course of life tended to the unseemly but necessary tasks of daily life, they were the ones who showed up.¹

And yet, their journey toward what was to be their final act of love and care for their friend and teacher, is laced with despair.

Though they brought with them spices to anoint him, they must have known by the third morning those spices would do little to abate the stench of death. And even as they approached the tomb they anticipated their failure, since they know that the stone covering the tomb itself will defeat their deed, as they have no way of rolling it back.²

But they came, because they **had** to come close, because their hearts led them there, because it's what needed to be done. And it was only in their coming close that they encountered the mystery of the resurrection.

Upon arriving at the tomb, the Mary's and Salome found the stone rolled back and a young man in a white robe sitting to the side of the entrance. Like in all encounters with messengers of God, the first words the young man uttered were, "*Do not be alarmed.*"

And yet, what he said, what they saw, **was** alarming. Jesus was gone. He was not there. The messenger then explained that Jesus had been raised and they were to tell Peter and the others that they would find him in Galilee, just like Jesus always told them they would.

¹ *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 2*, pg. 354.

² *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 2*, pg. 355.

They went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

It does not feel like it, but this, **just this**, is the end of the story in Mark's Gospel. There are no stories to follow the empty tomb, no appearances of Jesus on the road or by the beach, no more final words of wisdom or direction.

They went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

That's the end we're given. Some have called this faithlessness, completing the circle of all those who knew Jesus abandoning him, showing the sinfulness of humanity in contrast to the faithfulness and divinity of Christ.

But I think this ending makes sure we know we have entered a mystery – we have found our way into *kairos* – and when we come close, it will be our hearts, not our heads, that lead our response to encountering the holy.

Because *terror* and *amazement* are words that describe one's reaction to a theophany, to a revelation of God.³ And resurrection is a revelation, an altering of the rules of the known world. It is a sign of a love so profound that no words can ever describe it.

In the face of theophany, amazed silence is not a failed or inadequate response, it is not a sign of faithlessness. It is a wholly appropriate response, because the women's silence creates a space for the voice and presence of God to resound.⁴

³ *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 2*, pg. 357.

⁴ *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 2*, pg. 357.

What could they say to that messenger? How could they, in that moment, tell the others about what they had experienced without making it into a story about what they saw and heard, instead of about what God had done?

Better to end it there, because this ending makes room for a beginning. And it is the women who went to the tomb who show us where the next part of the journey will take us, something only possible because they showed up in the first place.

Their hearts brought them to a place where they found, not what they were looking for, but a revelation of God, a mystery that changed everything they knew, and the enduring images are elemental –

The shadow of the early morning sky, the perfume of the fragrant spices, the force of seemingly immovable stone. The empty tomb, the messenger from God, the terror and amazement – holy awe.

This is the power of the resurrection that we once again encounter tonight, that we have re-created tonight. It is the story whose end is not an end, but a beginning – transitioning from darkness to light, from despair to amazement.

It is a revelation for us too, transforming our lives and re-defining our identities. Because of the mystery of Jesus' resurrection, we are called to live resurrection lives.

Paul, in his letter to the Romans, writes that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into this death. But just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of God the Father, we too walk in newness of life.

We all have to practice our baptism each day, dying to our old selves and living into the promise of new life.⁵ This is both simple and hard.

Simple because it means taking the promises we make in the Baptismal Covenant seriously, letting the affirmations frame who we are and how we live in the world – making those the central ideals that guide our behavior and decisions.

Hard because it means taking the promises we made in the Baptismal Covenant seriously, letting the affirmations frame who we are and how we live in the world – making those the central ideals that guide our behavior and decisions.

The good news is that whether simple or hard, we do not do this alone. We do it with God's help, and we do it in community.

My prayer for us all on this night, at this Vigil, is that we allow ourselves to be terrified and amazed at the empty tomb, trusting that while no more is written, it is a story that continues and is indeed our story. And because it is our story, that we accept the gift of new life our story offers, living resurrection lives and showing forth the light of Christ in the world.

~ AMEN ~

⁵ *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 2*, pg. 350.