

Sermon: Easter Vigil

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April 4, 2015

Year B

Vigil

Genesis 1:1-2:4a [The Story of Creation]

Genesis 7:1-5, 11-18, 8:6-18, 9:8-13 [The Flood]

Exodus 14:10-31; 15:20-21 [Israel's deliverance at the Red Sea]

Isaiah 55:1-11 [Salvation offered freely to all]

Ezekiel 37:1-14 [The valley of dry bones]

Zephaniah 3:14-20 [The gathering of God's people]

At The Eucharist

Romans 6:3-11

Psalm 114

Mark 16:1-8

The movement of our liturgy tonight... and our procession from the cool outdoors and darkness... to the warmth of new fire and light... recalls God speaking light into being... and the Creation stories in Genesis... it enacts Christ's movement from death to life... in our brief liturgy... we enact the entire scope of creation and salvation history...

And even though we know the story... when we listen... we hear something new every time... we understand something in a new way... that touches us... or that changes us... we are still drawn in to a story full of dramatic events... but also full of foreshadowing... of signs of what's to come...

In Genesis... God calls creation GOOD... who are we to say otherwise... the hymn in Ephesians 1:4 sings that... *God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love...* and God's incarnation and the world's redemption could *only* be... God's proactive work from the very beginning... God's love is the beginning... and the end of the story...

When I served on the bishop's search committee in southern Ohio... I heard a human resources person say... that the best way to see how someone will behave in the future... is to look at how they've behaved in the past... this may be true on more of a superficial level... it may be true for bishops... but it's not all there is to it... it's too

fatalistic... it diminishes our free will... our capacity to grow and change... I think it may be true for example... for someone who... remains hostage to unresolved family of origin issues... which diminish our full potential... it may be true when we *react* to situations... instead of acting out of a silent... peaceful... inner grounded-ness...

But in the light of Christ... we are in every moment... invited into an Exodus freedom... we were once bound to sin... but are now bound to Christ... we may once have seen through a mirror darkly... but now we are able to wash the scales from our eyes and see with greater clarity...

We will still sin... we will still miss God's mark for us... but God's focus is not on your past... or your past... or my past... but on the promise of our future...

In other words... in the here and now... we remain both sinners and saints... we may still be prone... towards impulses... or thoughts... or words... or behavior that is less than what we're capable of... but those things no longer bind us... and they no longer *determine* our futures...

Few people would call themselves prophets... almost no one we know would presume to speak for God... but there are signs all around us... that speak to us... people whose joints hurt before a storm... animals that act up before an earthquake... we sometimes just know... when someone's going to propose... or ask for a divorce... children and adults... almost always know when their behavior is pushing the envelope... and when there are likely going to be consequences...

And we can look at the social landscape... and see what's going on with the increasing acceptance of same-gender marriage... with the ongoing challenges of racism... with an increasing gulf between the rich and poor... with concerns for the environment and global warming... and project probable trajectories... in many ways this is not rocket science... because the divine impulses... along which life moves... exist within us too...

Our Gospel this evening starts with the story of the three women... coming to the tomb... as they went... they wondered who would roll away the stone so that they could... as Jewish custom dictated... anoint Jesus' body... the tomb had been sealed to prevent Jesus' followers from stealing the body and just *claiming* resurrection...

These three women came... but there was someone else... an unexpected person... in an unexpected place... who had *already* done... what they were coming to do... remember... two days before the Passover... when Jesus was sitting at Table... in Simon's home... a woman appeared... she had an alabaster jar of expensive nard... that she broke and poured on Jesus' head... people accused her of wasting what could have been sold to support the poor... but Jesus defended her... saying... *she has anointed my body beforehand... for its burial...*

The disciples in general and Peter in particular could not fathom Jesus' suffering and death... When he spoke about rising from the dead... the disciples could not understand the phrase... When Jesus insisted that suffering is the path to being with him... the disciples only heard promises of glory...

So although Jesus spoke openly about suffering... dying... and rising... no one's on the same page as him... until this woman arrived... and her symbolic action provided Jesus with something he often looked for... but rarely found... true understanding...

So this woman must have been paying attention... she must have been alert in the way Jesus spoke over and over again about being alert... she must have been sensitive to the telltale signs and unspoken impulses of prophecy... to the timeless impulses of divine love... which would form billions of galaxies... and reside in the human heart... Theologian Mark Sandlin wrote... that Jesus said he came not to destroy the Law or the Prophets... but to fulfill... some translators add the word *them*... as in *to fulfill them*... but that word's just not there... in the Greek though... the word for *fulfill* can also mean

to make complete... so Jesus might have said... I've come to destroy how you are using the Law... and, thus, how you understand sin... the way the Law was being used by Temple leaders... was creating sin... was missing God's intended mark...

And so if Jesus came to help us understand the fullness of biblical Law... he could only do so by teaching us about what complete and full love looks like...

Sandlin writes that one of the most significant factors that put Jesus on the cross were his actions in the Temple courtyard... he entered the courtyard knowing he was entering Judah's hub of power... he was confronting the religious leadership in the heart of their own market... the very place where they made *the profits* which funded their power... he did it under the watchful eye of Roman guards who were there to ensure that there was no trouble during the annual Passover celebration... and which provided temporary escape from the heavy hand of an unjust ruler...

Jesus knew what he was doing... he knew he would be seen as a threat... he knew where it would lead... Jesus predicted... three times before even entering the Temple... that he'd be given the death penalty... so why did he do it... why did he die on a cross...

Because he offended those in power... because he challenged the *status quo*... because love would not sit silently by... while those who had little... were being stepped on... used... and abused... by those who had so very much... he died on a cross to show us what love in action looks like...

Very early on the first day of the week... when the Sabbath was over and the sun had risen... Mary Magdalene... and Mary the mother of James... and Salome bought spices... so that they might anoint Jesus... the women wondered who would roll away the stone... but when they got there... the stone was already moved and Jesus was gone... no wonder they fled in terror and amazement...

But I have to believe... that if the risen Christ could enter the Upper Room... even when the door was locked... then he could certainly have gotten out of the tomb even if the stone had not been moved... so what does the moved stone and the empty tomb tell us... this... I think... is where truth transcends history... because this truth applies to all of us too... if the tomb couldn't hold Jesus... then the tomb can't hold us either... if we have died to our old selves and been reborn in Christ... then we too have been freed by God's love... which removes the stone... and what that means... is that we can be free from everything and anything that entombs us... and when love rolls away the stone... then everything changes...

And when we know what love in action looks like... then best way to predict future behavior is no longer to look at our own past... but to look at Jesus... and reflect his values in our lives... not to be him... but to be ourselves with his authenticity... if we have died to our old selves and have been reborn to new life in Christ... then the Exodus is just our beginning... and we really have been given freedom beyond our imaginings... freedom from imposed limitations... freedom from our pasts... freedom from Empire... and the freedom to prophecy what we already know... that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ... and that we too have broken out of our tombs...

Happy Easter.

Mike+