

# Sermon: The Great Vigil

The Rev. Mike Wernick

April 15, 2017

Year A

At the Vigil

Genesis 1:1-2:4a

Psalm 136:1-9,23-26

Genesis 7:1-5, 11-18; 8:6-18; 9:8-13

Psalm 46

Exodus 14:10-31,15:20-21

Exodus 15:1b-13, 17-18

Isaiah 55:1-11

Isaiah 12:2-6

Proverbs 8:1-8, 19-21; 9:4b-6

Psalm 19

Daniel 3:1-29

Song of the Three 35-65

At the Eucharist

Psalm 114

Romans 6:3-11

Matthew 28:1-10

We are exhorted over and over again... to become aware... to be awake... to take on the mind of Christ... to forgo our small reasonings... for God's great reasonings... *My ways are not your ways*... says the Lord... but increasing awareness... increasing self-awareness... having someone at home with the lights on... doesn't always mean that we know ourselves... fully... at least not yet... doesn't always mean that we fully know why we do... each and every little thing that we do... doesn't always mean that we know just exactly how we compensate for our brokenness... we may be right some of the time... but increasing self-awareness doesn't mean that we see all our motivations... the way God sees them...

I don't know whether and when and where we will... but we certainly don't yet... and increasing self-awareness certainly doesn't mean that we know why others do what they do... even after years of being in relationship... we may think we know why our partners or spouses... or children... or relatives... or co-workers... or priests... do what they do... but somehow... in the moment we decide that we know... we take away their free will... and don't let them do what they do for their reasons... we take their reasons away and in our heads... they do what they do for our reasons...

In Matthew 27:62-66... the day after Jesus was murdered and buried... the chief priests and Pharisees went to Pilate... they were concerned that some of Jesus' followers would steal his body... and just claim that he had been raised... as he said he would be... they were afraid of being deceived... so Pilate gave them permission to go and place guards... and make the tomb as secure as they could make it... these are the same guards about which we hear in tonight's Gospel... all the leaders... thought they understood why they were doing what they were doing... but God understood something different...

When the two Marys... went to the Tomb... they went with what they thought were their reasons... to grieve... to pray... to anoint... but they encountered an earthquake... and an angel... and a stone that was not where it ought to be... they thought they knew what to expect... what they thought would happen... but what they experienced... effected a change within them... a new realization about how things were... and could be...

There's a story I read by John Shea... that helps us understand how this new kind of insight... can emerge... slowly sometimes... sometimes with difficulty... and sometimes with fear and great joy...

The teacher decided that the class would put on a play during the first few days of Holy Week... there were more children to cast in parts... than there were parts... so she got creative... and cast the tree from which Judas hanged himself... the broken vase of perfume... five children simulating the earthquake... three children making the sound of thirty pieces of silver clattering on the Temple floor... bystanders... more bystanders... and still more bystanders...

She also cast the rock that blocked the entrance to the tomb... this was not a difficult task... in fact... it was blatant typecasting... there was a boy... who had... as his mother put it... sprouted early... he was definitely bigger than a bread box... he was also...

when he was on his knees and bent over... with his hands clasping his ankles... a perfect boulder...

For the Angel of the Lord... who pushes the rock aside... she chose the most petite girl in the class... just one size up from Tinker Bell... during the first performance... with her little finger outstretched... she nudged the rolled up rock... and he somersaulted away from the entrance of the tomb while at the same time remaining rolled up... the Angel sat on him... making the stone of death... the throne of God... and the audience went wild... and chanted... Rock! Rock! Rock!... and a star was born...

The teacher was not sure all this attention was good for the Rock... she suggested that the glory be shared... but he said... *I like being the Rock... Why... the teacher asked... I like letting Christ out of the Tomb... but John... the teacher said... the boy's name was John... but John... the rock isn't rolled back so Christ can get out... he is already gone... the Rock is rolled back so the women can see in...*

John's face twisted a moment... as he floundered for the first time in the deep waters of the Spirit... *Well... he asked... How did he get out if the rock was still stuck in the hole?...*

This is the kind of question all teachers fear... and it is often light-years beyond what the questioner is able to handle... and as the teacher remained silent... hoping the right words would come... an inner light ignited inside of John... and it illuminated him... and gave him right understanding... *Well... he said... I guess huge rocks are no big thing for God...* thus did the Rock also roll back the boulder from his own mind... and see into the empty darkness of the Easter revelation...

It's what the two women experienced... as the Angel exhorted them to not be afraid... as they looked at the place where Jesus had been... as it all began to sink in... and

their fear turned to joy... as they left the place of death... and encountered Jesus on their Way... who also said... *Do not be afraid...*

As we move from our creation story... when darkness covered the face of the deep... through the flood... when waters covered the face of the Earth... to Israel's deliverance from the darkness of slavery through the waters of the sea... to Isaiah exhorting us not to spend money on that which is not bread or work for that which doesn't satisfy... and to Wisdom's call to lay immaturity of all kinds aside... and to God's deliverance even from a fiery furnace... as we move through these stories... we see that we too... are moving into increasing light and life...

The chief priests and Pharisees were afraid... they thought they knew why they were doing what they did... but they could not comprehend... what an eighth-grader came to understand...

Sometimes... our fears are like boulders that seem immovable... boulders that block the light... and keep us isolated and in the dark... but as we take a few mental steps back... and move from where we think we can see everything... from where we think we know why this or that is happening... we experience an expanded field of vision... we find ourselves to be like Mary Magdalene and the other Mary... who arrive in darkness... and move into understanding... and we are overcome by God's light and love... the reason we celebrate tonight... is that Jesus was already gone... he's already moved our tomb stones... and his new life... is our new life... Happy Easter!

Mike+