Sermons at Christ Church

Reaching Out in Faith

Easter Vigil
Rev. Emmanuel Mercer

We gather tonight to celebrate the triumph of life over death, the triumph of light over darkness and the blessing of having a new mind. Tonight we are more than comforted with the idea that death wouldn't have the last word, because life is full of beauty and grace. Tonight we also acknowledge that life is both transient and fragile, and for that reason we should refuse to deceive ourselves with the illusions of permanency. Tonight we celebrate human history with God; beginning with the story in Genesis, Luke's gospel recaptures God's relationship with us by the pre-eminent act of God: the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Luke's account of the resurrection morning is as dramatic as his account of the annunciation to Mary by the angel. It is fascinating that at the very beginning of Luke's gospel, we read of an angel sharing with Mary the good news of God's salvation plan for the human race and invites her to be a part of God's plan. Mary wondered how this could happen since she was a virgin. As surprised as she was, she heeded the angel's invitation, not with a definitive understanding of how this whole plan will play itself out but with the deepest conviction that as lowly as she was, she will be a part of something unfathomable, something crazy and yet holy.

In Luke's narrative of Easter dawn, he doesn't claim any knowledge of how the resurrection itself took place, just like Mary couldn't tell how she was to take seed, Luke simply describes how

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the tomb at dawn and hearing the angel say to them that Jesus was no longer in the tomb. Go and tell his friends that he has been raised from the dead.

What these women heard from the angel was beyond their wildest dream. Interestingly, they didn't ask any question about how it happened or what it meant to be raised from the dead or who raised him from the dead-all they heard and in fact cared to hear was that the Rabbi was alive. There's still life, there's still hope. Hope isn't dead. Hope has the last word. But these two women did not ask, not because it wasn't an important question, but who cares? What mattered was that he was alive, and that was more than enough for them. All they wanted to do was to share the good news they heard from the angels that the Rabbi was alive.

The horror of the past couple of days has given way to a new beginning, an indescribable joy, the kind of joy that transcended the power and ambit of human reason. And they believed that their march to share the good news of their beloved Rabbi's resurrection with the other disciples, will likely break the jinx of fear and dejection that had gripped them and rendered them incapable of doing anything.

For those of us who used to believe that God's stories of redemption can only be shared and told by men, within the story of the annunciation and the resurrection story, we come to realize the prominence of women as the new bearers of God's salvation story. God now uses Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, as the new conduit through which God's promises of redemption, God's promises of renewal of the mind, God's promises of hope for the hopeless, restoration for the brokenhearted, forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with all humanity is made possible.

The Easter story is full of intrigue and wonder, mystery and amazement. An inexplicable event, an in-breaking of God that became a turning point for these women and their friends. Suddenly they came to realize that they were capable of anything, that they could no longer look at themselves in the same way they used to.

They were empowered to acknowledge something powerful about the human potential, a power that up until then wasn't available to them; this power spurred them to rise above their narrow perspectives and to see the world more broadly as a place filled with the glory of God.

The human history with God has always been about a God who liberates and redeems and the resurrection is part of our history with God, the resurrection not only frees us from the bondage or servitude to another person or group of people, the resurrection sets us free from the captivity of the human mind to sin. So then, it does not matter if you are being oppressed by another person, so long as the mind of the oppressor is being held captive by sin, so long as the oppressor doesn't see in himself/herself the glory of God, the oppressor can never find a reason to set you free because he/she is not free. The Easter story sets free both the oppressor and the oppressed, opening them up to see the glory of God in each other. It is into this glorious kingdom do we welcome Anna through the sacrament of baptism.

A kindergarten teacher gave her class a "show and tell" assignment. Each student was instructed to bring in an object to share with the class that represented their religion. The first student got up in front of the class and said, "My name is Benjamin and I am Jewish and this is a Star of David." The second student got up in front of the class and said, "My name is Mary. I'm a Catholic and this is a

Rosary." The third student got in up front of the class and said, "My name is Tommy. I am Baptist, and this is a casserole.

Martin Luther in his wisdom wrote that "The love of God does not find, but creates that which is pleasing to it. The love of man comes into being through that which is pleasing to it. …the love of God…loves sinners, evil persons, fools, and weaklings in order to make them righteous, good, wise, and strong. Rather than seeking its own good, the love of God flows forth and bestows good.

Therefore sinners are attractive because they are loved; they are not loved because they are attractive…This is the love of the cross, born of the cross, which turns in the direction where it does not find good which it may enjoy, but where it may confer good on the bad and needy person."

The resurrection of Jesus is one more expression of what has been freely given to us by God's entry into human history. The first Adam is the prototype of who we are, folks with limitations, folks enslaved by sin, folks who are helpless and destitute searching for some meaning to life and our own lives. Easter is about celebration of the second Adam who through his resurrection freely offers to us the gift new mindedness; a new mind set free from sin because of its willingness to surrender itself into God's fullest glory. A new mind which is empty of itself and within its own limits recognizes the beauty of grace within it. A new mind that seeks to be baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ because it knows that it is only by dying to self that new life is made possible. A new mind that goes deep into itself and yet reaches its highest zenith in search of ways to fully live into God's purpose. Dare I say, a mind renewed for God's glory. You are that new mind, and the Easter story gives you a reason to come into yourself and be fully alive, for that is how God's glory can be made perfect in you. **Amen.**