

note that there are two sermons for Easter Sunday 2009 – the Vigil, followed by the 10:30 service.

**Easter Vigil – Rev. Jennifer Adams
Vigil Service – April 12, 2009**

Cold. Darkness. Us. / Fire. The light of Christ!!! Candles. Procession./ A chant summoning all the earth and the angels and the whole of the heavenly powers and the church then and the church now, summoning all to be present to the Story from the beginning, the very beginning. When there was night and day and then water and sky and then Earth. . . plants, trees, and stars. . . fish, birds, sea monsters. . . then cattle, creeping things, wild animals and us, human beings made in the image of God. / Then rest by God and a prayer from us. / The waters parting. Israel crossing. Miriam singing. Prophets prophesying. Bones dancing. More prayer. / Then light. Alleluia! Bells. Song. Empty tomb. Amazement. / This is the night! -- We sing. The night when slaves were led into freedom. The night when Jesus rose from the dead. Alleluia!

Benidicta Ward describes the Vigil like this: “On Easter night we are on . . . fundamental ground. . . shaped by the basic elements of earth, of air, of fire and of water. There is silence at the basis of it: [that’s part of the beauty of it isn’t it? The way the silence holds our anticipation in its every breath?] “when all lights in the church are extinguished,” she writes, “we stand with Adam in darkness, at the moment of Creation, in earth and air only, until new light is struck out of rock. . . A candle is lit and from it small candles take their light, so that behind each small candle-flame there is the face of a human person newly made in Christ whose only identity in the darkness is that of this new light. We are taken into a new dimension of life which is pure gift.”

We have come a long way together this week, walked a long way together this week. Just last Sunday we were out in the yard waving palms and shouting Hosanna ,walking through the neighborhood and processing into the church singing “All Glory Laud and Honor” as we remembered Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem. On Thursday we sat in a circle downstairs and talked to each other and ate soup and bread, and drank water and wine, and washed feet and remembered Jesus’ words to “do this in memory” of him. On Friday we knelt at the foot of the cross, heard of Christ’s death and encountered the presence of God in the most unexpected place of all. And then we wept and then we waited. We waited until now the night. . .

. . .the morning on which we celebrate the pure gift that is resurrection and alleluia and in forever sorts of ways, it is our hope. To look and listen to the whole of it like we do at this Vigil is to see and to hear that God has used the fundamental stuff of life to weave together an amazing grace. And while there is surprise – at almost every turn of the story and in our stories too – while there is surprise there is ultimately a holy predictability to it all. And maybe that’s the biggest surprise of all. God’s gift to us has a pattern that when you hold it all up, is blessedly obvious. Creation out of emptiness. Freedom out of slavery. New life out of death. That’s how it goes. Over and over again. Life that is new happens. No matter what preceded it. Even death. Because that’s how God works. And so on Easter, we not only celebrate that gift, but we’re invited through the rituals of the day to re- orient ourselves towards that rhythm, into that pattern that is God’s grace alive and well among us.

Heart. Mind. Body. Soul. / Believing. Forgiving. Hoping. / Being still. Walking. Together./ Hosanna. Take, eat, this is my Body. Crucify Him! and Alleluia! / In the beginning there was

darkness and there was light. In the middle there was darkness and there was light. In the end, there is no end. There is light. / “Behind each small candle-flame there is the face of a human person newly made in the Christ.” / Pure gift. / Amazement./ Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Amen.

Easter Sunday – Rev. Jennifer Adams
10:00 Service - April 12, 2009

Well the Church has come a long way this week; just last Sunday we were out in the yard waving palms and shouting Hosanna! processing through the neighborhood and into the church as we remembered Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem. On Thursday, Maundy Thursday, we sat in a big, wide circle downstairs and talked to each other and ate soup and bread, and drank water and wine, and washed one another’s feet and celebrated Eucharist remembering Jesus’ words to “do this in memory” of him. On Friday we knelt at the foot of the cross, listened to the story of Christ’s trial and death and encountered the presence of God in one of the most unexpected places of all. And then we wept and then we waited. We waited until now. . .

The now that changes everything. Which is what Easter does. It changes everything. But what exactly do we mean when we say that - the “changing everything” part -- because most of us are likely feeling and looking the same as when we walked through the door. The same number of fingers and toes and hairs on your head. The same people sitting next to you as were there before we shouted Alleluia! And odds are good that when we’re done with this celebration, you’ll get into the same car you came in and go back to the same home you came from. So what changes on Easter, really?

Benedicta Ward an author and scholar wrote a small book called *In Company with Christ* that our Holy Week planning group has been reading over the last few months and in this book, Ward says, “[On Easter morning] It is not that we become good, or clever, or nice, but that we are there, ready to be loved by the love which does not depend on our actions but is a free and unconditional gift to all. It is not that we shall suddenly find ourselves totally other on Easter Day – rather we shall know that each step of ordinary living from now on is within the dynamic procession of [God’s presence and love.]”

Like Mary that first Easter morning. The morning that changed everything. Mary had gone early, by herself to visit the tomb of her friend. When she got there she noticed that the stone had been rolled away, and so she went and got Peter and another disciple. They came and witnessed the empty tomb and then returned to their homes. But Mary stayed and she wept. Which is when Jesus came to her. At first Mary thought it was the gardener whom she turned away from the tomb to face, when he asked, “Why are you weeping?” She told him the story and it was when Jesus said her name, “Mary” she knew that he was the Christ. It was Jesus - no longer missing but risen from the dead. Standing in front of her. Speaking to her, there in the garden. And that moment changed Mary and the world forever.

Because death was no longer the end. Even death had been embraced by God and transformed by God into new life. I think we take that central gift of this story for granted because if we haven't actually heard this story word for word before we certainly know how it goes. Christ was born. He died. He rose. Period. But think for a minute about what that really means. Resurrection means that new life is always possible and not only that but it's likely, and actually it's not only likely, new life is certain to happen. Because today's gospel tells us, it's what God does. And that changes everything. On Easter we are given a forever reason to be a people of hope.

Which doesn't mean that weeping won't happen anymore. I actually think it means that, "Why are you weeping?" is one of the most important questions we can ask one another and ourselves too. It's where Jesus started with Mary that first Easter morning, and often, I believe it's where God starts with us. It's where the sparks of resurrection begin – in our dark places and the dark places of the world. On Easter morning we hear the profound and life-changing proclamation that God is present in the weeping places, with that unconditional gift of love - God at the tombs inside of us and around us life. The good news is that ultimately, there is nothing to fear because God is present there, asking us about our grief, our needs, our brokenness our hope. Our work is simply, faithfully to let resurrection happen, to allow ourselves to turn toward new life. To receive the unconditional gifts given. To let resurrection change everything.

And so later today or tomorrow when you return to life as relatively normal, let the question sink into your bones "Why is it that you weep?" It's not a question without joy, it's a question that ultimately in healing sorts of ways sparks it. It's where resurrection begins. It's how the holy changes takes place. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Amen.