

Homily, Easter Vigil
 March 22, 2008
 St. John's Episcopal Church
 The Rev. Mariann Edgar Budde

Moving From Darkness To Light

On this most Holy Night, in which our Lord Jesus passed over from death to live, the Church invites her members, dispersed throughout the world, to gather in vigil and prayer.

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb. . . John 20:1

Sometimes you have to move toward the light while it is still dark.

Sometimes you have to live according to the goodness you aspire to before you know for certain that it's in you.

Sometimes you have to consent to be raised from the dead, even when you aren't sure that you want to be.

Sometimes you have to give your very best effort, even when you know you're out of practice, out of shape, and out of sorts.

I was at a funeral recently for a man who was, as far as I could tell from the people speaking about him, a near-total failure as a parent. "He was like a magician when we were growing up," one of his daughters said. "He could make himself disappear." But later in life, when his children were adults and had children of their own, he made the decision to reappear and be a better grandparent than he ever was as a parent. As you might imagine, there was tension at first and a lot of unresolved emotion to work through. He wasn't very good at loving people, he realized. It took a lot of work. But he persevered, and overtime he learned how to be the kind of dad his kids could depend on and the kind of grandpa his grandchildren could love. That's what living by the light while it's still dark can look like—it's awkward at first, and we stumble around.

In one of the many versions of the story of Moses parting the Red Sea, there's one that tells of Moses lifting his arm to part the waters, and nothing happens. The Lord tells him to go into the water. So he goes into the water up to his ankles and then lifts his arm again. Nothing happens. He goes in up to knees and lifts his arm to part the waters. Nothing happens. He goes in up to his chest and lifts his arm. Nothing. Finally, he goes in up to his neck and lifts his arm one final time. *Then* the winds of God blow the waters back and Moses leads his people to safety on the other side. That's what living by the light while it's still dark can feel like—you're not sure that anything's different, but you go through the motions anyway, as if the miracle you're waiting on is already here.

Early in the morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb.

This is the night for us to remember that in God and with God, the light of light always follows the darkness of confusion. It's the night to remember that in God and with God, the promise of life always follows the despair of death. It's the night to remember that when all seems lost and hopeless, God will bring us onto the shores of safety.

And it's a night to remember that there are times when we simply need to get *moving*—to walk toward the light even when we can't see it. Because that's how resurrection works—someone has to plunge in, to go first and clear the path so others can

follow. On the first Easter Eve, it was the women who acted first, Mary Magdalene chief among them. They got up out of the stupor of grief. That's how resurrection works—someone hears the call in the middle of the dark to get up and move, and in the movement life stirs and the dawn breaks.

It is the greatest act of faith, to walk toward the light before we are assured of its coming. What we need to remember is that our willingness to do it is an essential ingredient of hope's fulfillment. God needs us to take that step. God waits for us, like God waited for Moses to enter the water, for Mary to go the tomb. Where would the world be the Moses and Marys of the world stood still?

Now if the rest of you would excuse me for a moment, I'd like to say a personal word to the four wonderful young people who have just been baptized. Colin, Elizabeth, Savannah and Hunter, God has been with you from the day you were born. Jesus will guide and support you and raise you up when you fall. When hard things happen, the power of God to bring light into darkness will keep you strong. There's nothing you need to do to earn that love, ever. It's there for you always. But sometimes we have to choose that love, just as you have chosen this night to be baptized. We have to let God's love in.

Resurrection asks us to stake our life on hope when hope feels small. The poet Gwendolyn Brooks, the first African American to win the Pulitzer Prize, once wrote, "Say to the down-keepers, the sun-slappers, the self-soilers, the harmony-hushers, 'even if you are not ready for day, it cannot always be night.'"

It cannot always be night. The dawn is coming. Even though it's still dark, the light of Christ is calling us, asking us to be the ones to move out in faith. Who knows what will be lost if we don't? And what might happen when we do?