

Bruton Parish Episcopal Church  
The Rev'd Dr. Daniel W. McClain  
The Great Vigil of Easter  
April 20, 2019

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Since the advent of the church, this service, the Easter vigil, has been the principal service of the Christian year.

And on this night, between sunset and sunrise, we proclaim for the first time  
ἀ , Ἀ ὦ ἀ ! Christ is risen. Truly, he is risen.

This is the church's ancient Easter proclamation.

This declaration, and the event it refers to is the center of our faith.

This is the proclamation that makes Christianity. It does not simply describe an event, but institutes and makes a new community. This literally is what makes the church.

Christ's resurrection from the dead, by the power and will of the Father, establishes and sustains through grace a new body, a new way of being in the world.

And this is good news; in the richest and most robust sense of the word Good, this is the Good News.

But why? What makes it good? Why is this news worth sharing?

Why do Mary Magdalene, Johanna, and Mary run to tell the disciples that Jesus is no longer in the tomb? Why do we pray, as we did last night in our Good Friday service, for those who had never heard the gospel of Christ?

This Gospel of Christ is the same news we proclaim in the Eucharist: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

I suppose we might each have a different answer to my question; I suppose that Christ's resurrection makes a difference in different ways and to a different degree for those who believe this proclamation.

But in addition to all our reasons, one thing that the Easter vigil reminds us of is that Christ's resurrection addresses a problem that is both anthropological and cosmic. From its inception, human sin, as we heard from our second reading tonight, attacked the very core of creation, of life itself. It ate away at the goodness and vitality of things. It introduced death into the world. Sin isn't merely a personal problem, nor is it only a human problem. Rather. It's a problem to the whole system. And this is why it's so fruitless and so desperate to think that any of us could possibly be good enough, could be virtuous and consistent enough to address the systemically vicious condition of sin.

God, however, intervened immediately, introducing a plan, a revolutionary solution from within the system, a plan that depended not on top-down action, but rather worked through the lowly, the insignificant, the meek. God called Abraham and Sarah to establish a faithful family and community; God worked through virulent, oddball, and oft persecuted prophets to draw that community back to himself; and, in the fullness of time, God entered into that family as one of them. Finally, as we are reminded every time we recite the Creed and celebrate the Eucharist, God in Jesus Christ not only became incarnate through the Virgin Mary and lived as one of us; he died as one of us.

In a quiet, and frankly really subversive, way, God in Jesus Christ inserted himself into the system in order to overthrow the problem that sin had introduced—Death. The second person of the Trinity became human, lived, and died. And because of his obedience to the Father's plan, because he lived and then died in the way that Adam and Eve should have— a life of complete and total fidelity to the Father— because Jesus lived that way, the Father, in his love and complete fidelity to the Son, raised the Son from the dead.

And when that happened humanity ceased to be bound to the finality and eternity of the condition of sin. When Jesus was raised from the dead, he introduced a new way of being to humanity, a way of being released from the bondage of sin and death, a way of being in which the finality of life now opens to the infinity of the Father's love.

The resurrected Jesus truly is the first fruit of a new creation, a new way of living in harmony with ourselves and with God.

And this is why Christians have even gone down to death with hope and confidence—the kind of confidence that comes from a new allegiance, our allegiance to the Kingdom of God.

Christians under Roman rule went confidently and hopefully to their deaths in the coliseum because they knew that just as the cross didn't have the final word with Jesus, their persecution and death in the arena wouldn't be the final word about them.

Rather, the Father would have the final word.

And that final word is Good.

Tonight, as we declare that Christ is Risen, He is Risen indeed, let us exclaim with joy for all to hear this good news, this news that we consume to our nourishment in the Eucharist, this news into which we just baptized our brother Chris, this news that offers a new way of living to all, a life that can be lived in love, and mercy, and goodness, because death does not have the last word.

The Father does.

And is it good.