

Great Vigil of Easter, Year A
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St Paul's Episcopal Church, Key West, FL
April 9, 2023
Genesis 1:1-2:4a
Exodus 14:10-31; 15:20-21
Isaiah 55:1-11
Ezekiel 36:24-28
Zephaniah 3:14-20
Psalm ?
Romans 6:3-11
Matthew 28:1-10

Easter Is an Earthquake

It is quiet as a tomb.

Roman soldiers have been standing guard, taking shifts since Friday afternoon.

They have followed Governor Pilate's orders and made it as secure as they can.

They have rolled a great big stone across the entrance to Jesus' tomb, a tomb borrowed from Joseph of Arimathea.

They are alert, attentive, doing their jobs. Nothing is happening where they are.

They have set a seal upon the stone indicating the tomb is under the control of the empire.

But it's not.

Something is going on behind that stone.

The tomb is also a womb, and new life is preparing to burst forth.

Because just like always, the place of deepest darkness is the place where fresh radiance begins, where new life starts.

So, if you are in a place that feels like death, if you are living a life of quiet desperation, hold on. There is more life on the way. That is the message of this day.

Something is going on behind that stone. God is still God. And God loves us, all of us, every one of us. That is the message of this day.

Jesus has been to hell and back. And I don't mean just the trauma and suffering of being betrayed, beaten, mocked, judged, crucified, and killed. He has descended to the dead and led all those locked in the grip of death into the power of the resurrection.

So, if the place where you are feels worse than death, feels like hell, hold on. Our God makes a way where there is no way. That is the message of this day.

Now it's Sunday morning. The sun is coming up. The guards are still guarding. And two women show up.

Just like they showed up and stayed with him till the very end at the cross, Mary Magdalene and Mary the wife of Clopas show up at the tomb.

And there's an earthquake. Another earthquake, like the one when Jesus died, remember? When the earth shook, and the rocks split, and the curtain of the temple was torn in two, and tombs were opened.

This second earthquake opens this tomb. The guards quake, too. The agents of empire fall down as though dead—and they might as well be—and a messenger from the true source of power and authority comes down, rolls back the stone, and takes a seat on it.

The Marys take it all in.

Something has been going on behind that stone. Jesus is already gone, raised from the dead. More life, new life on the other side of death. That is the message of this day.

It is Sunday morning. The sun is coming up. The mindset and old ideas that are standing guard and somehow stalling your life may still be there. And yet, you have shown up.

What are you looking for?

The angel gives the Marys a mission. They are as fearful as they are joyful. They do it anyway. Thank God they do. Otherwise, we wouldn't be here!

If you know what you need to do, don't let either fear or joy hinder you from doing it. If God has laid a mission on your heart, go there and do that for you are sure to meet the living Christ on the way, just as the Marys did. That is the message of this day.

Dear friends, Easter is an earthquake. God has indeed rocked this old world. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ, death has been defeated and life has been fully restored.

God has power over death and through Christ's resurrection has given us power to live with integrity, compassion, and joy in this world.

God is Life, and Life is stronger than death. God is Love, and Love is stronger than death. This is the great good news of Easter.

As I do on most Easters, I will give a poet the last say in this sermon, a poet, a monk, a mystic by the name of Thomas Merton.

Hear now the last stanza of his poem entitled "The Victory":

*Look up, you captives, crowding to the water,
Look up, Ezechiel, and see the open heavens
Salute you with the vision of the winged Evangelists.
You with your ankles in the water and your garments white,
Lift up your heads, begin to sing:
And let your sights, exulting, rise and meet
The miracle of living creatures
In their burning, frowning flight.
The message of their lamps and fires
Warns you: make ready for the Face that speaks like lightning,
Sets free the song of everlasting glory
That now sleeps, in your paper flesh, like dynamite.*

Christ is risen! Alleluia!