

Easter Vigil 09

This night is such a journey night, isn't it? – a long service with its own time and pace. We go back and forth in scripture to our firmest roots in God and we wander through the ages in music and text; we add our own chapters as we come forward in questions and answers, in hope and in mystery.

This night is God's response to the resounding "No" with which Jesus' ministry ends. God somehow refuses the verdict of a court and continues to invite us to look not at a failed messiah but at one who rewrites the script. God refuses to allow a human "No" to stand as the final answer to the book of Jesus as the new place for him is in our lives.

We don't always know how we will enter this long story; we don't always know what God has in mind for our lives. We do know that those who will be baptized into the mystery and hope, into God's "yes" to the world, will be a part of questions and answers for all of their faith lives. This night is about relationships, about a willingness to place our stories in the hands of others, in the mystery of threads that cross many lives in many places.

The longer I am a priest the more I trust these God relationships – their endurance and the breaking down of barriers and divisions. In some sense we have all waited for a long time for tonight. The arrival of all of us is met with great joy and celebration. Before all came to faith there were tears and prayers and open hearts waiting to be filled with the gifts of each other. We know that being drawn together is a great gift from God.

All of our stories are much like the Jesus story. The people of God had waited for him too, sometimes, when life was hard and lonely, they cried and they prayed. They wanted more life, more joy, less hardship and bigotry, less wandering, less separation. And when they believed that the Christ had come, their hearts were ready to welcome him.

Tonight we remember the welcome, the waiting and the receiving of God in people's lives. You also choose to welcome us into your lives, your prayers, your hurts, your growth as a person of faith. Your baptisms and ours are a part of God's radical welcome. They are a sign of God's great love of us all. God, with great prayer and tears of longing, has waited for all of us to come and be at home together.

God waited while Jesus slept in the earth, having journeyed to all sorts of places, among all sorts of people. And now we are together; we are a "yes" to that loving invitation. We celebrate a love that can wait, and rest, and sing and celebrate and wonder. This night is a sacred threshold time, when we claim that no matter what happens to us, to those we love, to those we don't, to the ones we can't know or reach, this time is a borderland for all of us. It is an edge of knowing, of questions, of even this 'resurrection thing.'

This resurrection thing is not a Hollywood script or a Stephen King novel. Harvey Cox, a long time professor once said that he taught religious courses for years, attempting to dodge the important questions about faith in class. He knew that his students were open

to mystical realms or at least to other dimensions of reality beyond scientific proofs, but he was reluctant to discuss the resurrection thing. I can't avoid the questions and neither should you. Stay with the questions, said one of my teachers; don't be in a hurry to find the answers.

In the Hebrew scripture Isaiah in particular speaks of God's raising the dead as a vindication of those who were victims of the callous and the powerful God has a thirst for justice and many of those who died as victims of injustice will be raised, he says. God's shalom over cruelty and greed and all sorts of other abuses will triumph in the resurrection of the just. In the early Christian texts, folks spoke about their experiences of deep meaning, of encounter which are hard to tell about, but which answered 'yes' to God's intentions; they claimed a new and resurrected life.

For all who study the faith, the continuation of the work of Jesus in the life and work of his followers is the resurrection something, the ways in which the cause of Jesus moves forward. Somehow we believe, despite much that we see, that God's shalom, that reign of God to which Jesus pointed, will ultimately triumph.

Do I fully understand the resurrection so that I am able to compel your belief or can I offer you a must do experience? I can't. But I can tell you that at age 27 I expected to die and I didn't. I've tried to spend the rest of my life as a student of resurrection, and I suspect many of you here this night have done the same.

The church tells us that we are a risen people, one family that has waited for God's joy to come into us. In the ordinary elements of bread and wine that we will share tonight, we are all of us learning what it means to taste the bread of heaven, food for our journey. We drink a cup of new life, a cup of compassion. This is our passing over meal; it is our passing into history, into community, into each other. It is our passing over into what God intends and we do that all time, stepping out of our own tombs from no to yes. Amen.+

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