

The Light of Christ

I. The Vigil of Easter

- A. One of my first experiences with the Episcopal Church was an Easter Vigil Service at the Church of the Ascension in Chicago when I was about 26.
1. Ever since then this service has been my favorite of all the liturgies of worship in our church.
 - a. It's a longer service than many of us are used to, historically beginning in the dark hours before sunrise on the morning of Easter Day.
 - b. We rehearse the history of salvation in nine pivotal readings of God's saving action among the Hebrew people of the first Covenant.
 - c. This is a drama about the ever present light in the darkness.
 - d. Even the darkness of Good Friday gives way to the first light of the Resurrection at dawn.
 2. In a microcosm of liturgy we celebrate the grand macrocosm,\ the whole movement of Hebrew/Christian proclamation about God, creation, and salvation.
- B. At the end of this horrendous ordeal of the past three days, tonight we proclaim the Light of Christ.
1. This Vigil of Easter has been called the Christian Passover.
 - a. The liturgy builds on our Hebrew tradition of the liberation of God's people from slavery in Egypt.
 - b. So, it has been the primary place in the Christian Year for Baptism,\ the beginning of new life.
 - c. It is the time we are invited to renew our baptismal vows, our commitment to the new way of living.
 2. And it is the first sharing in an action that Jesus left his disciples before his arrest, -- the sharing of Bread and Wine, where Christians have discovered Jesus' presence with us, as he promised, even beyond his death.

II. The Universal Christ

A. The mystery and wonder that is at the heart of this Vigil of Easter is that, in an intangible way, we are introduced to a new dimension,\ scarcely and dimly foreseen, in the small new flame of the Paschal Candle as it is carried into the dark church.

1. It is a new dimension of living that we have called the universal Christ,\ revealed in the flash of light which the darkness could not overcome,\ and now given a human face for us in Jesus.
 - a. It is Christ revealed for us in Jesus' complete self giving, culminating with his death.
 - b. Christ is revealed for us in Jesus' core message, that is now intensified even more at his death, forgiveness on a cosmic scale.
2. There is something new here,\ something bigger than any of us could have ever imagined.
 - a. It is bigger than any of the human projects that we have undertaken past or present, to proclaim our supposed invincibility.
 - b. It is something that surpasses all our self-centeredness, all our species-centeredness and everything else. ----

B. It should be a clue to us that the most frequently mentioned response to the Resurrection in the gospels is *fear*, -- six times in the four different stories.

1. When we are caught off guard and don't know what to do, our natural response is *fear*.
2. When our presuppositions and assumptions no longer account for what we encounter,\ we don't know what will happen to us.
 - a. Without warning,\ reality is something 'more' or 'other' than what we thought it was.
3. But our natural fear of this is more than just being scared.
 - a. It is a numinous fear, mixed with wonder and awe at something genuinely 'other.'
 - b. As the story of wonder unfolds and as we realize this is about us,\ all of us,\ the Resurrection overcomes our #1 fear, (1. our fear of death and in that,\ it calls us to a level of life in all life's abundance.

- c. Ever since, it is the risen Christ always bringing you and me and others back from all our own fears and forms of death.

III. Boundary Times

- A. Celtic Christians spoke of times of great loss and change as “*boundary times*.”
 - 1. You are standing on “*boundary ground*” – when the solid ground upon which you once stood appears to have become a swamp that can no longer bear your weight.
 - a. Surprisingly, they called such a place, “*sacred space*.”
 - 2. The boundary is like the shoreline by the sea.
 - a. On one side you see the solid ground you have lost, ---
(1. the hard-won building of your life,\ your career,\ your marriage,\ your family,\ your friends,\ your health...
 - b. On the other side you see nothing but the expanse of an unpredictable ocean,\ with no land in sight.
 - 3. The ground at the boundary is hallowed ground even though it seems like a swamp of despair.
 - a. It is hallowed precisely because here you encounter the call to a new stage of being,\ a deeper layer of the ground of your being.
 - b. These places are always places of our vulnerability,\ but also places filled with new possibilities, the *Light of Christ*.
- B. The risen Christ stands with us at these boundaries, whatever times or places of vulnerability they may be for us.
 - 1. Christ calls us to transcend what we’ve thought were finalities in our lives today,\ to have faith in the light which the darkness cannot put out.
 - 2. Join with Christ in the infinite dance of God’s love. We journey towards the new creation.