

The Great Vigil of Easter, Year A

Genesis 1:1—2:2 Genesis 7:1-5,11-18; 8:6-18; 9:8-13 Exodus 14:10—15:1 Jonah 1-3 Matthew 28:1-10

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

What a blessing it is to be here.

When I say that,

I don't just mean

“it's nice to see you”

(though, it is).

And I don't just mean

“welcome to our church,”

(though, you are).

What I mean is:

we are blessed by God

to be here with him

and with one another,

doing the thing

that Christians have been doing

on this day

for thousands of years:

Lighting the fire of our hearts,

telling the stories of our faith,

welcoming new members into the Body,

and shouting from the rooftops

that our God is good.

For his Son has conquered our death;

Christ has demolished our sin;

and we have been reconciled to God.

I don't know if you noticed,

but there was a particular theme

through all our Old Testament readings this morning.

It was really a kind of happy accident.

We didn't set out for it to happen;

it just did.

Did you catch it?

It was the theme of *water*.

Water, that God created in the beginning.

Water, that rose up over the earth
and set Noah on his voyage.

Water, that God split in two
so Israel could pass through on unmoistened foot.

And water—
murky, murky water—
in which the reluctant prophet Jonah
found himself paddling
as he tried his level best
to flee from God
and God's call on his life.

How fitting!
How perfect
that God would give us *these* stories today,
on the same day we plunge
Katie and Verity
into the waters of baptism.

Water is all around us,
and like the prophet Jonah,
we are
drowning
in grace.

Speaking of Jonah,
have you ever noticed how much
Jonah has in common
with Jesus?
How Jonah
presages,
prefigures,
points to
Jesus?

Jonah,
there on that rocking ship,
sacrificed himself for others.

“Well guys,”
he says,
“God is angry,
and we’re in trouble.
You better throw me over.
It’s the only way
for you to be saved.”

But Jesus does it *better*.

Jesus looked
at the storm of our sin,
saw us rocking in the tempests of our despair,
and unlike Jonah,
Jesus was willing from the start.
“Let me go there,” he said.
“Throw me over.
Throw me in.
I’ll do it.
I’ll *gladly* do it.
It’s the only way
for them to be saved.”

Jonah,
buried in the belly of the whale,
sat and sulked
in his own private hell
until finally,
he found God.

But Jesus does it *better*.

Jesus descended to the dead,
was buried in the belly of the earth,
and entered the hell of a million, million souls.
Jesus did not *find* God there.
He *took* God there!
He loosed the chains;
he broke the doors.
And now, there is nowhere we can go
—including even our own graves—
where Christ has not already
made a way through.

And finally
after three days,
Jonah found himself
thrown from the fish.
Really, the Hebrew is
so much more
vivid and unseemly:
instead of “thrown,”
it’s more like
hurled, heaved,
spat, spewed,
belched, retched
or disgorged!

Perhaps that’s an odd visual
on this bright Easter morning,
but even so:

Jesus does it *better*.

Jesus,
whose love for us was so strong,
whom death could not contain,
did not merely
“step out” of the grave.
He did not “mosey,”
or “saunter,”
or “amble”
his way from the tomb.

With all the force of heaven
against all the power of hell,
death
rejected
Jesus.

Just as Jonah
was *hurled*
from that great fish,
Jesus was *hurled*
from death and the grave,
never to see them again.

And can I tell you the crazy thing?
Do you want to know the grace of it all?

We are so much like Jonah.
We are obnoxious and flippant.
We are self-centered and rude.
We are sinful, simple, silly, and stupid.

But we have been buried with Christ in his death.

Like Katie,
like Verity,
and like all the saints
through all the ages,
we who are baptized
have gone under the water.
We have gone into the grave.
“We have been buried with Christ in his death,
and just as Christ was raised from the dead
by the glory of the Father,
we too can walk in newness of life.”¹

If Jesus is hurled from the grave,
we will be, too,
for “this is a true saying,
and worthy of all to be received:
that Christ Jesus came into the world
to save sinners.”²

Brothers and sisters,
on this sunny Easter morning,
water is all around us.
God’s *mercy* is all around us.
God’s *love* is all around us.

We have been
buried with Christ
in his death,
and we are
drowning
in grace.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Amen.

¹ Romans 6:4

² 1 Timothy 1:15