
EASTER VIGIL SERMON

ALL SAINTS' CATHEDRAL - 8 APRIL 2023

Introduction

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! **The Lord is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!**

Tonight, my friends, we celebrate the greatest of all feasts, the greatest of all celebrations.

Tonight, we celebrate that on this night Jesus Christ vanquished hell, broke the chains of death and rose triumphant from the grave.

Tonight, we remember that in the cold dark tomb where Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus the Pharisee laid the dead body of Jesus, the breath of God blew, and raised Jesus from the dead.

Tonight, we remember Mary Magdalen going to the tomb while it was still dark, and meeting the risen Jesus.

Tonight, we observe the new Passover of the Lord.

Tonight, we renew our commitment to being resurrection people by receiving the grace and mercy of God and by bringing that grace and mercy to others.

My friends, how do I capture this great gift of resurrection in a twelve-minute sermon? I can't. It will take at least an hour. (We have all night.) 😊
Just kidding!

Making Things New

Tonight, we remember the resurrection because from it everything else flows. The resurrection changed everything. Its power has rolled through human history, even when the church has faltered badly. God so loved the world, that **in Jesus he is making all things new**. I love so much that our God is always working to bring healing and wholeness. I love so much the vision of God bringing love where there is hatred, bringing forgiveness and

restoration where there has been rupture, bringing light where there is darkness, bringing hope into hard places.

I love stories of resurrection! They move me deeply; Throughout Christian history, we hear stories where resurrection breaks in to bring grace. There are countless stories I can tell. A new one for me that I just read about this week comes from Uruguayan writer, Eduardo Galeano. He was actually an atheist, but he took the time to tell the story of an Easter service in the middle of a prison camp in Uruguay in 1973. Those were hard years in Latin America. Across the continent, military coups overthrew democratically elected governments. And these dictatorships were brutal and harsh: arresting and torturing people and making many just disappear. Galeano was one such detainee in 1973. He writes,

NINETEEN SEVENTY-THREE. Montevideo, Uruguay, Ninth Cavalry barracks. A rotten night. Roar of trucks and machine-gun fire, prisoners facedown on the floor, hands behind their heads, a gun at every back, shouts, kicks, rifle blows, threats. ...

In the morning, one of the prisoners who hadn't yet lost track of the calendar recalled, "Today is Easter Sunday." Gatherings were not allowed. But they pulled it off. In the middle of the yard, they came together. The non-Christians helped. Several of them kept an eye on the barred gates and an ear out for the guards' footsteps. Others walked about, forming a human ring around the celebrants.

Miguel whispered a few words. He evoked the resurrection of Jesus, which promised redemption for all captives. Jesus had been persecuted, jailed, tormented, and murdered, but one Sunday, a Sunday like this one, he made the walls creak and crumble so there would be freedom in every prison and company in every solitude.

The prisoners had nothing. No bread, no wine, not even cups. It was a communion of empty hands.

*Miguel made an offering to the one who had offered himself.
"Eat," he whispered. "This is his body." And the Christians raised
their hands to their lips and ate the invisible bread.*

*"Drink. This is his blood." And they raised the nonexistent cup
and drank the invisible wine.*

The resurrection of Jesus brings grace and hope even to the hardest places. It speaks grace to the tired human heart. Again, I could tell so many stories. One that I keep coming back to is the story Martin Luther King Jr tells about how he was ready to give up the fight for civil rights.

His family had been receiving threats just after the Montgomery bus protest. He realized that many of these threats were serious.

"I felt myself faltering and growing in fear. It seemed all my fears had come down on me at once. I had reached the saturation point." One night, he couldn't sleep. He got up and began pacing around, his mind reeling with the threats that had been accosting his family. Exhausted, but with his mind still racing, he tried to come up with a way to bow out of the struggle without seeming like a coward. But instead, he bowed his head to pray.

"I am here taking a stand for what I believe is right. But now I am afraid. The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength, they too will falter," "I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I have come to the point where I can't face it alone."

In that moment, a powerful shift happened, quiet but profound.

"At that moment I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never experienced him," Dr. King writes. "It seemed as though I could hear the quiet assurance of an inner voice, saying, 'Stand up for righteousness, stand up for truth. God will be at your side forever.' Almost at once my fears passed from me. My uncertainty disappeared. I was ready to face anything. The outer situation remained the same, but God had given me inner calm."

Resurrection Today

My friends, the resurrection of Jesus is God's greatest gift of grace constantly surprising us. The church in every generation has had to discern how to live out the good news of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ in their day and time. Previous generations have focused more on the part of the good news that is about eternal life with God after death. And this is great news. I have now accompanied dozens of people in their final hours to the point when they have taken their last breath. And I have given thanks that as I have held people's hand, that I could share the gift of Christ's promise that he is with them every step of the way into new life. This is good news. But the good news of resurrection is even bigger than this.

The church in the last few generations has been reclaiming the good news of God's will being done here on earth as it is in heaven. What Jesus called The Kingdom of God. The resurrection is about a new creation, a new heaven, and a new earth. There is a remarkable discernment and convergence in the mainline churches recapturing a vision of God's grace both healing the human heart of all that ensnares it AND a new vision for community. It is the vision that the ancient church lived out in the midst of the oppressive Roman empire: a new community centered in Christ where the old division were broken down. There was no more rich or poor, slave or free, Jew or Greek, male or female. But a new community where all were equal and one in Christ. We will experience this tonight when we are led to reaffirm our baptismal covenant. We will proclaim our faith using the words of the Apostle's Creed and then we will reaffirm promises to pray, continually repent, to proclaim the Gospel and also to serve Christ in all persons, and to strive for justice and peace, and to protect God's creation.

This is a robust vision of living out the resurrection that has come from the church learning from our broken history and repenting, living resurrection in a new way: from the experience of the church supporting the dictatorships in Latin America, from the experience of the church promoting racism in apartheid South Africa, and from the experience of the church setting up Residential Schools here in Canada. In meditating and turning from our failings as a church, we have actually been given the gift of even greater insight into the power of Christ's resurrection. This vision of resurrection

living is articulated in the five marks of Mission that form our way of expressing what it looks like practically to join with God in the mission to redeem the world. A vision that mirrors our baptismal promises, and this is no accident. And this is the vision adopted by the global Anglican communion.

Conclusion

But at the end of the day, resurrection is not lived out in big ways. It is lived out by everyday people in their everyday lives, coming together in prayer and fellowship and through simple acts of love and kindness. Yesterday, I was able to go to the Good Friday Outdoor Way of the Cross. I was deeply moved. I gathered with about 350 people to carry the cross of Jesus Christ through the inner city and pray for the housing crisis that is taking place in the city of Edmonton. And these are not people who are just praying. Many, many of these people are on the front lines of grace praying with people on the street, offering resources and advocating for long term solutions to this housing crisis. And many of them have been at it for a long, long time. They are committed.

What moved me the most about the 2-hour walk was that it didn't just feel like Good Friday; to me it was much more a profound glimpse of resurrection. It was a group of Christians from many denominations **just being Christian**, humbly praying and singing and witnessing to a vision of the Kingdom of God as justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. A kingdom where people are loved and valued regardless of where they find themselves, and a simple vision and hope of everyone knowing the gift of home and belonging.

Tonight, is a celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and it is also a glimpse of the resurrection. I feel so blessed to be able to worship with you, the members of so many of our parishes. We are not just an institution but a family, brothers and sisters, siblings united in Christ for a common purpose: God's love for all the world in Jesus Christ. I am so glad that we can do this together.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! **The Lord is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!**