

Episcopal Church in Lockdown

Knoxville, Tennessee 37918

Easter Vigil (A)

April 11, 2020

A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish

“Are we coming unglued?”

DRAFT

The Holy Gospel

according to Matthew 28:1-10

After the sabbath, as the first day of
the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene

and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples,

‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message for you.” So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

The tomb is empty! Let us come and worship our risen Lord, Alleluia. Amen.

Big round stone on the ground with an angel sitting on it—it's a picture we may have seen many times, but why was the angel sitting on it? Was someone going to try to put that large stone back on the empty tomb? Was the angel tired after moving that huge stone—do angels get tired? I think of emergency workers at work around the clock keeping things working, helping to heal the sick, delivering groceries to the homebound,

keeping the power on, feeding us new varieties of television programming, praying for others, consoling others, loving others whom they don't even know. They don't seem to get tired. Let us pray for them. Angels don't get tired, but people do.

In the passage just prior to today's, the stone on Christ's tomb was sealed. The authorities did not want anyone to try to steal the body. What an easy job as soldiers guarding a glued up, sealed

tomb. See that rock; do not let anyone try to move it.

But the angel did; the soldiers were defenseless. An earthquake and a lightning-appearance being probably impressed them to cower as the stone was rolled away.

A random caller happened to get my number from some un-updated website and said he needed to speak to someone. He was in tears. He had been isolated for weeks and perhaps was feeling a bit stir-crazy. Immune to most every disease, he was concerned he could be a

carrier. He was very healthy. At the end of the conversation I suggested he wear a mask and try to help some community group get food to the needy. He seemed good with that.

A lot of people are hiding behind doors tonight and tomorrow and so on. The virus has most of us in its controlled cloud of fear. And if not, the curfews try to contain the rest. A woman in northern Italy complained that she could walk her dog 200 meters, but not her child; later that strict order was rescinded; but grocery shopping is trial.

We know many of the scenarios.

But back to the angel--how was this gesture of a sitting angel comforting, ...or was it? The gospel writer only reports the scene as was told by onlookers.

For one thing, the angel was directing traffic to the Risen One, up in Galilee now, he said; and go on up there: tell his disciples. When we get to the center of many towns there are sometimes signs that tell us where to find somewhere else,

maybe to the emergency room, and they do help. But when we set our compasses or cell phones to get somewhere, we first need to know where we are going. So what are our plans once the plague abates? Do we have a plan? Will it be any different than what we had already planned. Will this Lent have taught us anything? And if so, what?

Making and keeping connections with others seems a key thing in the midst of this crisis. Whom have we called or texted or emailed today to say we are

concerned about them or want to hear from them? Christmas cards are a rather distant way, but when a card comes back, what do we do next? Maybe we should begin sending Easter cards, and make the spaces between saying Hi a little smaller.

How is your neighbor? How are your comrades, fellow workers, friends, even folks walking down the street? What about down at the church? How are things there--any feeding going on, passing sandwiches and groceries across the fence to the starving? Anyone

driving groceries and medications to the homebound? Who is calling the ill and homebound?

Putting nothing in the offering plate seems an easy out. How do we still contribute? How do we continue to serve the last, the least, and the lonely? How can we still give ten percent or more? Or do we need the church to help us in our time of need? (Who is fielding the church answering machine messages?)

Perhaps the angel was reminding us not to try to reseal the proof of the Resurrection. Go on, look inside. He is risen. Go look for him where ministry still is ongoing. Do not give up. Instead, give hope. Give kindness. Give love. OK, maybe it will be only a smile and a wave for now. But this too is a way the closed tomb is being every so slowly opened, unsealed, unglued, and for the good of humankind everywhere. Get busy doing good to others. Keep up your offerings. By our love, they will know we have been loved with an eternal love.

May the Risen Lord keep us loving
and busy doing good.

Peace. Amen.

Description: A Resurrection angel points the way to the Risen Lord as an example for us to follow. The long night is coming to an end. Do not give up hope, and keep on loving our neighbors as we love ourselves.

Tags: angel, Lord, Jesus, Christ, God, direction, seal, glued, unsealed, loving, neighbor, emergency, workers, disciples, church, feed, hungry, call, sick, homebound, earthquake, curfew, wave, bow, peace

Another sermon for Easter Vigil

April 15, 2017

Tonight in the Easter Vigil we have had a tour de force of scripture from the whole Bible to welcome Easter and our Risen Lord.

Why do you suppose the lectionary committees chose the readings we have just heard?

There are probably a myriad of answers to the “Why these texts” question, but I will suggest some threads that I see running through all these many readings for Easter Eve Vigil. Each reading refers in some sometimes guarded way to Jesus Christ and his resurrection. As you know, Jesus Christ, Son of God, is often thought of as the Second Person of the Trinity, following “Father” and preceding “Holy Spirit”.

And we refer to his location in the Trinity more formally as the “Logos” which is a Greek term that in English translates to “Word” or “The Word”. For example in the Gospel according to John, in the first couple dozen words of John’s Prologue in Chapter 1, Verses 1 and following: the writer of John uses the word Logos several times, which we remember as we recall the phrases, “The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us”, and “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” These references are

generally interpreted to indicate that Jesus was a divine part of God in the beginning, part of the Holy Trinity in fact, and that when the Logos, or Word, ‘took on flesh’, that that was the story of the “Incarnation”, that God had come down to Earth in truly human form, “and dwelt among us” for about 33 years.

So, it is not a big stretch of credibility that whenever we see the phrase relating to God that refers to “God’s Word” we are seeing in a divine disguise or perhaps better, we are to see the divine symbolism particularly in the Old

Testament, that Jesus Christ, Son of God, can be substituted in place of “Word”, or “God’s Word”, or “The Word”. And, further, when we see “the breath of God”, or “breath” in the Old Testament, we can see the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, also being present in many scripture verses. So, for example in the Second Scripture for tonight in Psalm 33, Stanza 4, on Page 5 we see, “the Word of the Lord is right.” And in Stanza 6 we read, “By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made”; and we begin to see Jesus Christ as being part

of the Creator, the creative impulse of God. The Logos, the Son of God, was right there from the very beginning, even before time and Creation. In Psalm 33, “For he spoke, and it came to pass.” The Creator includes the ‘spoken word’ of God.

Now, when you are interviewing candidates for your new Rector or Priest-in-Charge, you may find some like to be a bit ‘modern’ and use as a blessing at the end of the Eucharist, “in the Name of the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier” or a number of variants on that theme.

That blessing was an anathema to my Seminary Advisor, the late Rev. Dick Norris, who cringed when he heard that sort of blessing, because he, rightly, I think, taught us that theologically the Creator was not just God the Father, but was also God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit; and that the Redeemer was not just “Jesus Christ” or “the Logos” but that God the Father was also the Redeemer as was the Holy Spirit; all three Persons of the Holy Trinity are involved and indistinguishable as being the “Redeemer” even though we often

point to Jesus himself as being “the Redeemer”. One reason is that all three Persons of the Holy Trinity are involved in ‘redemption’, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Although the death of Christ was a singular event, Jesus himself did not raise himself to life, but his heavenly Father raised him, and the Holy Spirit put life, breath, back into his lifeless body. So all three Persons of the Holy Trinity are involved in redemption and are important parts of being the Redeemer. And as for “Sanctifier”, not only is the Holy Spirit part of our

sanctification, but God the Father who created us along with the rest of the Holy Trinity was also a crucial part of the Sanctifier. So we cannot separate out any one Person of the Holy Trinity as having one function since all are necessary and also sufficient, as a mathematician might say. So Professor Norris would tell us that if a priest insists on using a (quote) modern blessing of “Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier” that the next time that priest pronounced such a blessing that in all fairness and in true theology, they should change the order

of those names each time: Redeemer, Sanctifier, and Creator; or Sanctifier, Creator, and Redeemer”, and so on, but few priests who have theological training will switch around the so called “order” of functionality of the Trinitarian blessings, even though theologically they should.

Even in the story of the Exodus, our first reading for tonight--God drove the sea back by a wind’ and in the original Hebrew text of this story we hear the Hebrew word, “ruach”, when we see either the English word “wind” or

“breath”, as the Hebrew word, “ruach” can mean either “wind” or “breath”. So the Holy Spirit was involved in the salvation of the Israelites, and there is that phrase a few verses following that, from Exodus 14, that “Then the Lord said”, again the Word of the Lord is there, the Logos who speaks God’s word and is God’s word. And when the writer says, “Thus the Lord saved Israel that day” that all three Persons of the Holy Trinity are at work together, undivided, inseparable, One in Three and Three in One as the source of Israel’s salvation.

We the followers of Christ have become the Israel that God saves.

And in each of the readings one can see the dancing around of the Holy Trinity in each instance, sometimes referred to as the “Perichoresis” of the Holy Spirit, as the three Persons seem to ‘dance around’ in choreographic resemblance to do the mighty works of Yahweh God since they, the three persons of the Holy Trinity, are in fact together “Yahweh God”.

In Canticle 8, from Exodus 15, we read, “the Lord has become my Savior”;

thus, even the Savior which we usually refer to as Jesus Christ, is in fact, God the Holy Trinity, who is the Savior.

Exodus 15, the reading for Canticle 8, was written hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, and already then the “Lord” is “Savior”.

Further, in the “Dry Bones” reading from Ezekiel 37, the Lord God “says”, read into that, the Logos, the word of God is there—the Lord God says “O breath” which is the “ruach” the “Breath” of God, also in that same verse, the “Winds”, also in Hebrew the same

word, “ruach”—“Oh breath, ...breathe upon these slain, that they may live”; this is a foretelling, a telling ahead, that God has in mind to raise us back to life, not as living creatures on Planet Earth, but as part of the Communion of Saints who along with the Heavenly Host continually praise God. And further in that reading, near the end we see, “And I will put my spirit within you, and you will live” is a prophecy of our raising from the dead, having God’s Spirit, the Holy Spirit” within us to enable our breath to praise God. And that passage

from Ezekiel ends with a reference to the spoken word, the Logos: “I, the Lord, have spoken....”

In Cantic 30 resurrection is the reason for this song of praise, as in Stanza 3 we read, “You brought me up, O Lord, from the dead”; that is a reference to the risen Lord, Jesus Christ, and also an allusion to the fact that the Lord will also be the one to raise us up, on our last day on earth.

In the reading of Zephaniah, Chapter 3, the reference to bringing the people back to Zion would be seen today by us

New Testament folks as a reference to “Holy Zion”, heavenly Zion where God dwells in splendor and power; there will those who have been separated from the Lord by his death will be brought by God back into God’s presence, into Holy Zion, without sin: “you will not bear reproach”, and God will bring us “home” to live with God forever and forever.

Then finally in Canticle 98, “The Lord has made known his victory”; God is victorious over death and the enemy satan. And that Canticle ends with choruses of praise and joy because in the

previous reading of Zephaniah 3, God is a “warrior who gives victory” who “will rejoice over us with gladness, he will renew us in his love” and will relieve us of the disaster of death—he will ‘remove disaster from us, so that we will not bear reproach for it’, we will not bear reproach for our sins, because the Lord has protected us by his blood spilt from the cross, and by his mighty resurrection from the dead.” So as Canticle 98 commands, “Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things; With his right hand and his holy arm has

he won for himself the victory”, the victory over death and the grave. And his victory is our victory when we put our faith and trust in him.

Alleluia, Christ is risen.

The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia.

Amen.

And the following meditations may help:

Methodist Bishop Will Willimon says, “There are so many ways to

‘explain’ the resurrection. The point is, [however,] we can't ‘explain’ the resurrection. The resurrection explains us!” The resurrection explains why we are such ardent Christians, firmly believing that our future is guaranteed to be with our Lord in heaven no matter what happens to us here on Planet Earth or what happens to us anywhere else as far as planetary exploration is concerned.

Notice what Jesus tells the women, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (the proto-Altar Guild): "Greetings! Tell my brothers to meet me in Galilee." My

brothers! The two most important words of this story. My brothers (the remaining Eleven Apostles). And note also that Jesus does not first appear to his ‘brothers’ but to the (proto-) Altar Guild, the first Altar Guild. Why do you suppose Jesus appears first to the Altar Guild and not to the clergy or to the Vestry or to the congregation? Was Jesus telling us how ‘things work in our world’, that if the Altar Guild says so, it has to be so. And then the Altar Guild is charged by the Risen Lord to tell everyone else, from Peter, James, and

John, and Matthew (who is presumably writing this down in his gospel) on down to the rest of the House of Bishops, the House of Deputies, the Vestry, Clergy, and all the other lay leaders and laity.

The Risen Lord knew the wisest way to spread the best good news anyone had ever heard--his first announcement was to the Altar Guild. And they were the ones who would spread the wonderful good news to the others that The Lord was alive and had risen indeed!

Matthew tells us that it's not about "believing." It's about what you do with

that belief that identifies you as a child of the Resurrection. The Resurrection compels us to be agents of reconciliation between the Risen Lord and the rest of the world, to be the announcers of the Good News to all the others, that we are not to keep this great Good News secret, but we are to shout it from the housetops to the rest of the world: Christ has risen from the dead! Being a child of the resurrection does not mean we have everything figured out. When the disciples finally meet Jesus on the mountain in Galilee, Matthew tells us

“but some doubted.” That's okay. The resurrection is big enough to handle our doubt. “Thus, the same elements of worship, doubt, and little faith inhere in the church after Easter as before.

Whatever the nature of the resurrection event, it did not generate perfect faith even in those who experienced it firsthand. It is not to angels or perfect believers, but to the worshiping/wavering community of disciples to whom the world mission is entrusted.” (per the New Interpreter's Bible) This is the good news.

<http://nathanmatttox.blogspot.com/2008/03/easter-sermon-its-how-you-believe.html>

Methodist Pastor Nathan Mattox says, 'This is what is exciting. The resurrection hasn't ended. It is still going on in your life and in mine. We have the opportunity to participate in it by our life lived in the name of Christ. That's why it is so beautifully fitting that we have a baptism [tonight] and [add] another brother to the community of faith. We

[add another] witness to the resurrection. He will [become a full and equal] part of the [Christian] faith. And it won't be what he believes that makes a difference to Christ. It will be “how” and if he believes [and also witnesses to] the resurrection.’

Now why did Jesus tell the Altar Guild he would appear to the disciples in Galilee? We are never told the answer, but one speculation is that the person, telling this story back in 85 AD as part of Matthew’s Gospel, knew Jerusalem had already been leveled to the ground in 70

AD, 15 years before this Gospel is being written, and that really the church only survived in that first century by ‘moving on’, by not staying in the Jewish Holy City, because that City of Jerusalem in 26 AD was destined to be destroyed 44 years later in around 70 AD. And if the church and the first Christians had gotten firmly ensconced in Jerusalem as their ‘home base’, the church would have gone under just as did the Sadducees and their sacred Temple in Jerusalem. The Church, Christians, survived because they were willing to be mobile, willing to

take the Good News of the Resurrected Christ ‘on the road’ to the rest of the world, and not to be anchored down by a specific Temple or synagogue or church or location anywhere on earth.

Galilee, to which Jesus was asking the disciples to go to meet him, was also known as Galilee of the Gentiles; Jesus was pointing the all Jewish disciples towards the rest of the world beyond the pure Jewish territory, beyond the Temple hierarchy, beyond the landed roots of the people of Israel. As Abraham had been called to go to the Promised Land of

Israel from his home in Ur in what is modern day Iraq, now the Lord is calling the Chosen People of the Resurrection to go out from the original Old Testament Promised Land of Israel as a geographic central landmark, and instead they were to take the wonderful news of the Resurrection to the whole world, to the Galilee of the Gentiles. The “New” Promised Land would not be a geographical location on Planet Earth or in our Solar System, or anywhere else in our universe; but the Promised Land of the new Israel was now the Promised

Land of Heaven--the Promised Land not on earth, but in Heaven. As we pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." We are being called to heaven, but on the way there to our final destination in heaven we are to work diligently to follow God's will and God's ways on earth as they are followed in heaven. We here are to be the ones who help others visualize and realize their potential as eternal beings with God by how we love each other and all

humanity, as we are the followers of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Lutheran pastor Rev. Mary Hinkle Shore writes, ‘When Jesus says [to the two women, the proto-Altar Guild], “Do not be afraid,” [Jesus] makes it clear that what could have happened did not [happen]. The earthquake and the resurrection are both signs that the end is at hand--but what kind of end? Until the women see Jesus, they do not know precisely what kind of end it will be. What about those who deserted Jesus, and the one who denied him, and those

who were powerless to do anything but look on as the grisly scene of crucifixion unfolded? What about them? In the end, will they find that his blood is a judgment against them? Will we? But, “do not be afraid,” Jesus says. “Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.” As the first Christians came to recognize the risen Christ, they experienced boldness and freedom of speech that surprises those of us who read their stories. It is as if their security came from the inside out. They were [suddenly no longer] afraid of people

who scoffed at their claims. They were [never again] afraid of authorities who ordered them to stop speaking of Jesus. They were free from what the neighbors thought about them and free from what the established power structure could do to them.’

http://day1.org/1087-the_insecure_tomb

Pastor Hubert Beck offers: ‘The account of Jesus’ death and burial which we hear in the text becomes the account of the death and burial of our old life, the life in which sin and death prevailed.

And the account of Jesus' resurrection which we also hear as part of our text, in turn, becomes the account of the new life, which is none other than the life of our Lord Jesus, into which we are raised out of the waters of our baptism. Do you remember that reading [we] heard earlier from Paul's letter to the Romans? [Paul said,] "Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through

the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” Those are powerful words, for they speak of Jesus’ life, suffering, death and resurrection as though they were our own. We [are] joined to his suffering and dying in our baptism, just as we [are] joined to his resurrected life in [these] waters! It is as though time [has] collapsed and what happened to [Jesus is happening] also to us in the moment of our washing [in the waters of baptism]. Or to put it another way, what was so necessary for us, namely, that the ancient foe of sin and death had to pass away if

anything new [is] to come about in our lives: [that is what happens in these] waters as we [are] joined to the [Messiah] who had overcome [sin and death] in our place and for our benefit.



‘This most certainly is what Paul spoke of, [writing to the Romans], as we heard earlier, “If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with,

that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. [And] if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. . . In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. . . . but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as

instruments of righteousness.” [Our] story is his story. [Our] “once upon a time” is joined to a “once upon a time” two thousand years ago.

‘May [our] life be so [co-mingled] with his life that those around [us will hardly be able to] tell the difference [between Christ’s life and our life]! Oh, yes, sin continues to live within us – even alongside the Christ who is in us – but the wonder is this: the venom of Eden’s serpent has been drawn by this crucified and risen One, and although the serpent may bite with a fierce sting, [the

evil one] no longer has death-dealing power. For [in baptism and faith] we are joined to the [Christ] who has crushed the serpent's head even though the serpent struck a mighty blow on the heel of him who crushed its head (per Genesis 3:15). The serpent, [the satan, the deceiver], no longer has any ultimate power over us. For we have been “buried with Christ and raised from the dead!””

<http://www.predigten.uni-goettingen.de/archiv-7/050327-6-e.html>

“Defining” moments are what some folks might call them. As we gather on this Easter Sunday eve we celebrate the single most important defining moment of our Christian faith -- the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Without this defining moment, none of the other defining moments of our lives would ever make sense.

http://www.lectionarysermons.com/marc_h=31_02.htm

Alleluia, Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia! Amen.

Description:

The Easter Vigil readings point us towards the miracle of resurrection when all sins are forgiven and all who believe in the Christ will find resurrection, Just as God raised Jesus from the dead, so will God raise us on the Last Day. In the Vigil there a variety of readings, including Genesis 1:1--2:2, Canticle 33 from the Book of Common Prayer, Exodus 14:10—15:1; Canticle 8 from Exodus 15:1-6, 11-13, 17-18; Ezekiel

37:1-14; Canticle 30; Zephaniah 3:12-20;
and Canticle 98. At the Eucharist that
follows are read 1 Corinthians 5:7-8;
Romans 6:9-11; 1 Corinthians 15:20-22;
Romans 6:3-11, and Matthew 28:1-10.

Tags:

Jesus, Christ, God, Logos, word, Spirit,
Creator, Sanctifier, Redeemer, breath,
wind, ruach, Hebrew, Testament, New,
Old, Canticle, Zephaniah, Psalm,
Exodus, creation, Ezekiel, bones,

breathe, resurrection, Genesis, John,
Gospel, prologue