

Easter Vigil – 2024

First Lesson: Romans 6:3-11

³Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷For whoever has died is freed from sin. ⁸But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. ¹¹So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Gospel: Matthew 28:1-10

¹After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ²And 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. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. ⁵But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷Then 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.' ⁸So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹Suddenly Jesus met them and said, 'Greetings!' And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.'

Vigil - SBUX campout

In the name...

↳ we didn't do it to pretend like we cared

In Genesis, God creates a world, commissions Adam to name a rolodex of animals, causes Adam to sleep the sleep of death, and resurrects a church on the other side—her name is Eve. In the Gospels, Jesus creates a Kingdom, is commissioned to rename the names—stone temples become the Temple of his body; bread and wine become body and blood; He then offers himself to death, and resurrects a church on the other side—her name is the City of God.

In Genesis, God begins naming children as heirs—a holy lineage of a Messiah and a Church that are destined for a manger. In the Gospels, Jesus becomes a child, welcomes children, and then heralds forth on the tongue and lips of Peter in Acts 2 that the promise is for you and your children—and all who are afar off. If children are no longer part of the deal, then Jesus was rather unclear, and Peter was just plain wrong.

But let us be clear about the resurrection for a moment: a staged resurrection would have us all playing church this morning—passing around some tasteless biscuits in hopes of ameliorating some guilt that we're not doing enough. That's not the testimony of Scripture. This is real. Only one Society is given the promise of ultimate change—the prevailing against hell. Only one City is given the promise of hope and justice. Only one King is placing enemies under footstools. Only one People are militant in the cause of righting the wrongs of the world, the flesh, and the devil. We have only one Head, though we are many. We are initiated and marked by the bath of Christ. We call it baptism. We all talk the same way. We call it our liturgy. And we all read the same authors. We call it Scripture. We all partake the same meal. We call it Communion. Friends, here we have no lasting city, but we seek **that** city which is to come. Therefore, let us go outside the camp and bear the reproach that Christ endured. Humiliation before exaltation; wilderness wandering before Promised Land. A move away from comfort and toward need. This is not a story of man and him improved. This is the story of Christ and him crucified **and resurrected.**

~~It is with a palpable sense of THAT city that Peter writes. It is with the sure confidence of having seen the nail prints in his hands that Peter writes. This is what he writes of the baptized and the believing today—he writes it of you, and he writes it of Colton Jeremiah and of Chasen Arin: "Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."~~

Colton & Chasen

This baptism does not deliver ~~you~~ from trials. If anything it guarantees them. Among the prayers offered today, this one in particular I find gripping: "WE receive this Child (or person) into the congregation of Christ's flock; and do *sign *him* with the sign of the Cross, in token that hereafter *he* shall not be ashamed to

confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under his banner, against sin, the world, and the devil; and to continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto *his* life's end. Amen."

We are not baptizing this morning to stage a unique form of sweetness and heart-warming kumbaya. We are baptizing men for the faith—men who must be tempered by trials to fight against sin, the world, and the devil.

The church is unusual. The church is that holy city that finds utterly normal things of this world—two rad boys—and translates him into the household of the NEXT WORLD through Word and Sacrament. Colton and Chasen's future after today calls forth St. Michael and All Angels to their preservation before God Almighty. And the same is true for you. Colton and Chasen's family today extends well beyond their older brother, parents, and cousins. St. Joseph, whose feast day was last week, is now his great grandfather. Peter and Thomas, highlighted in this month's lectionary—staggering great uncles in the faith. St. John, the patron saint of his parish—the godfather of his patronage. Deacon Lisa and Father Willie-- their baptismal sister and brother to the death. Their citizenship is not merely rural Oklahoma, their citizenship is in a City whose walls contain the universes themselves. God's eternal and everlasting grip on these children begins today. We love because he first loved us and gave himself for us.

At this altar, Colton and Chasen has will have their first meal in the City gates. It is here that he breaks bread with the whole company of heaven. And it's far bigger than Colton and Chasen—you, too, make you feast today at the King's Table in the new Kingdom. He was born for you. He grew in wisdom and stature for you. He suffered in the desert for 40 days for you. He proclaimed the Sermon on the Mount for you. He restored widows for you. He died for you. He rose for you. He ascended for you. He deigns now to preserve thy soul unto everlasting life with his resurrected body and blood. You are not playing church this morning—you are the church of the living God.

~~So come this morning. As a little child.~~

~~Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.~~

~~These are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.~~

So here's our life in God, friends – a comprehensive wisdom deposit that steepens members in the recorded fundamentals of a virtue tradition with God as their prize, the world as their wonder garden, the cross as their consolation, their language-liturgy a renaming of the world, Holy Scripture as their story, the Blessed Sacrament as their spiritual energy, the Baptism bath as their unquestioned inclusion.

The pregnant cave is empty this evening. Love has rushed out, and love looks like something very real and physical—Jesus the light of the world. Rome's slave, Jesus, who was a prisoner of the state, 'tried' by the state, tortured by the state, and killed by the state has shown us that He is not of this world--the world could never fully contain him, Rome's chains were never all that threatening; nor could the rules of death and despair that the world offers its inhabitants restrain him. This is not in disregard to the world—it's to remake it.

So what are the circumstances of world renewal? Do I need an Iowa caucus? Maybe some Apache helicopters? Maybe world renewal is romantic? If we could just go back to 18th-century America, all would be well with religion, right?

Here's where Scripture begins world renewal: A Palestinian garden with a cave. The earth gives its earthquake announcement that new life now ushers forth from its depths. Resurrection will not be top down; it will be ground up and therefore capture rocks, weeds, flowers, planets, and galaxies with the Church to boot. The brightness of glory is the first noticed—lightning is his face. And the first victim of resurrection – fear. DO NOT BE AFRAID. Might I add – of anything. These women who are midwives to the cave heard his sermon on the mount. When he says, "Do not be afraid", their minds return to a place now two-years removed:

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life[Ⓜ]?

²⁸“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³²For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

You were once afraid for your next meal. I shall give you my body. You were once afraid for your next outfit – I shall clothe you in lightning. You were once afraid that you wouldn't raise you kids in the right way. My kingdom belongs to children. You were once required to deal

with all of life in terms of 'worry'—in full knowledge that not a single hour was added to your life because of it. I now give you the birds as witness of the Gospel and forever free you from worry. The birds have neither bunker nor barn. And yet your Father feeds them. You once feared Rome and therefore told lies for the sake of survival. I now give you a Kingdom that puts an expiration date on Rome, and my Peter shall remake Nero's precious Vatican Hill as a permanent place for worship of a loving God.

So what are we up against? This year? Maybe the paralysis that comes from a culture defined by shame and fear. But you are free. The freedom is total. You may now walk in love.

Either way, welcome to the party for the baptized, dear friends. The party for those, as Paul says, who are "dead to sin and alive to God."

Let us be clear, dear friends. There is sin and brokenness in this world. Fear, prejudice, intolerance, wild injustice and inequity, and sin. Jesus didn't stage a flash mob for some Facebook likes. Jesus didn't show up fashionably late to an already-great party. He came to raise the dead. The things that hurt the most need the rescue to come from the deepest places. It would be insulting to people in their hour of grief to say, "God can't do a thing about this except give you really warm feelings about love." Instead, it's reassuring to know that love conquers even the thing that we find most unconquerable – which is death. And if death can be reversed, well then....so can everything else. If even death can be reversed, then the only thing left in this world is hope.

Massive doctrine, which leads to heightened and beautiful truths—the greatest of which is this. At this altar, your relationship to everything in this world—God first and all the way down is grace, grace, unerring grace. Your relationship to your friends and enemies is now grace. Your relationship to politics and paying bills is now grace. Your relationship to taxes and tariffs is now grace. Whether in triumph or in tiredness, it is grace all the way down. The body of sin no longer has a hold on you. The body of Christ now envelopes you. And so to this altar of grace we now turn with heads held high—for our redemption draws nigh. The Lord is Risen indeed. Alleluia.