

The Great Vigil of Easter, 2013

Genesis 1:1-2:4a

Exodus 14:10-31, 15:20-21

Ezekiel 36:24-28

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Zephaniah 3:14-20

Romans 6:3-11

LUKE 24:1-12

EASTER TURNS THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN

We may sometimes like to think or to assume that we are living at the high point of history (after all, it's when *we* are alive) in the greatest *place* in the world as well as in the greatest *time* in history.

But what if the greatest place in the world (because of being where the greatest event in all history happened) was *not* part of the metropolitan area of the largest city in the world's only superpower, but was rather an obscure, small conquered territory hundreds of miles from what people thought was "the center of the action"? Then maybe political, economic and military power aren't *really* quite so important after all.

And what if the greatest *time* in the history of the world -- when the most important event in all history happened -- was *before* smart phones, before the internet, before electric lights, even before the printing press, then maybe technology is *not* the defining measure of a time's greatness. Maybe technology is important, but not *all* important.

And what if the news of the greatest event in all history was brought to the world in that so-called powerless place and so-called backward time by *low*-status people: members of a conquered people and of a small religious body, people who probably could not read or write? *Women*, in fact, for crying out loud, women who lived in an extremely chauvinistic culture which contrary to the reading from Genesis we just heard denied them status as *persons* made in the image of God and equal to anyone else. If illiterate Palestinian Jewish women were given the lead roles in first spreading the biggest and best news in human history, as Christians have celebrated -- or merely admitted -- ever since the Gospels were written, then maybe social status according to human cultures is *not* all it's cracked up to be either. Maybe the status which God confers as a *gift* is more important.

Then, maybe a lot of what many people and entire societies spend enormous energy and resources putting *first* in their lives is actually secondary, or even an optional extra. Maybe conventional social status is like wallpaper: something to use for decoration in some rooms of your house if it appeals to you, but something no sane person would use for either the foundation or the roof or his or her house. After all, what would have happened to such a house when Hurricane Sandy or Hurricane Irene hit? Actually, Jesus has an answer to that question.

Maybe economic, political and military power are as transient as those held by the seemingly endless and supreme Roman Empire of 2,000 years ago: transient indeed. Maybe also technology is a tool, not a totem, a means, not an end. And then the question becomes a means to what, and for whom?

The assumptions and pretensions of life in the Roman Empire were radically challenged by the news a few scared, astonished women brought at first to a few initially patronizing, disbelieving men who later wrote down for all the world to see how right the women had been: *Christ is risen*.

The power of the Empire, which killed Jesus, did *not* have the last word: *Christ is risen*.

The power of sin which infects all of humanity to this day does *not* have the last word: *Christ is risen*.

Entropy does not have the last word -- the universe is not on an inevitable track to decay and extinction: *Christ is risen*.

Death does not have the last word: *Christ is risen*.

THEREFORE -- what a great set of “therefores” we have -- therefore we can all let go of anxiety, because evil has lost the decisive battle. *Therefore* we can all let go of striving for “more” as the central driving force of life, because apart from membership in God’s family, any status is superficial, fragile and temporary.

Therefore we need neither be too elated nor too depressed by who seems to hold power in this world, because true power is never for human beings to *possess* but only for God. *Therefore* we can focus on justice and love for all of the creatures of God, because in so doing we are embracing the original *and* final intent of the One who created the

universe and all that is in it and who intervened in history to liberate slaves and lead them across the Red Sea to freedom.

Therefore we can look at the status which *God* confers upon *all* people as made in God's image and challenge all social structures and attitudes which oppress anyone anywhere. We can embrace "enough" as an objective, not an endless "more." And *our* status, our technology, our power can be used not for ourselves alone, but to serve God's purposes in transforming the world from one wrapped in fear, anxiety, exploitation and injustice to a world in which God's abundant life is steadily taking over, just as the first crocuses of early Spring are the vanguard of a wonderful invasion of blooms and new life in the weeks which follow.

Easter turns the world upside down. Listen to the women who first spread the Good News: they knew. Let us ask God to transform our own personal worlds in accordance with God's will, and then let us ask God how we can join in God's transformation of the world, one day at a time, by God's power which is higher than all other powers.

Jesus has won the *decisive* battle over sin and death; now he invites us to join his holy liberators to continue his work until it is complete when the kingdom of this world becomes the kingdom of our God, and of his Christ, when he shall reign for ever and ever. Alleluia, Christ is risen! "The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!"

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New Brunswick, New Jersey
March 30, 2013