

†Will's Sermon

The Great Vigil of Easter Renewal of Baptismal Vows and Eucharist

March 22, 2008

Lectionary Readings: Exodus 14: 10 – 15:1; Ezekiel 36:24-28; Romans 6: 3-11;  
Gospel – Matthew 28: 1-10

“On this Easter Vigil it will take lots of fingers to count all the references to New Life. We light the new fires. We pass through the Red Sea, from bondage toward the Promised Land.

From Ezekiel we are cleansed, given a new heart and a new spirit.

Romans says it all, “We have been baptized into His death and we too walk with Him in newness of life.”

Matthew uses the narrative form. He tells a story about Jesus not in the tomb but waiting for his disciples in Galilee. It was, of course, Galilee where Jesus began His journey to Jerusalem.

On this night our focus is Baptism. Some still see baptism as the written guarantee for a place in heaven. Interesting notion.

For us, Baptism is the **initial hug** we share with the Living God. Baptism for us is the celebration of our eternal relationship with God.

At Baptism, we are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ's own forever. Page 308 of our Prayer Book.

The words from Romans express the theology. “We have been baptized into His death and with Him in resurrection.” These are heavily coded words.

We are saying we have the audacity to see ourselves as co-creators of God's Kingdom on earth. You and I are no longer enslaved by the world's symbols of abundant life. We do not seek a deep relationship with power and wealth, or fame and security. Rather, we continue our relationship with God. For us, abundant life is giving of self – abundant life is living into our Baptismal promises.

Okay, so how are we different from any other person seeking to do good?

First of all, we do not seek goodness. We seek our continuing relationship with God. We clearly observe the ebb and flow of our conscious contact with God.

Without our relationship with God, a thirst develops. Some will say, 'I sense something missing' or 'I don't feel close to God'. Some are simply overwhelmed by anxiety, fear, and dread.

Our first promise, continuing in the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread and in the prayers is one of the maps for our relationship with God.

The Apostles' teaching. She told me she was reading the Bible from the beginning to the end. I asked, 'Why? That's the worst way to read scripture. It is much more fun and interesting to read what Biblical scholars think. When we look at what three well respected scholars say, we can see their ideas.' A good scholar will never say 'What Jesus meant by this was'. If you ever hear these words run away quickly.

It is important that we ponder our Biblical understanding in community and fellowship. Our Episcopal Church will never tell us what to think, yet we will receive several broad interpretations that withstand time and lots of thinking.

Breaking Bread. Making present the living body of Christ. Participating in the action that reminds us we are part of the living Body of Christ. One will not find this on the golf course. It is *the* important action that renews our relationship with God.

And it is in prayer that we remain Number 2. In prayer we express our dependence. We ask for help. We give thanks. We ask for the welfare of others.

So at Baptism we celebrate our relationship with God. Our Baptismal promises suggest ways to continue and practice this life-giving relationship.

When we sense the distance, when we have no conscious contact with God, it will help to be a part of a Bible Study, to read several Bible commentaries of one verse in the Bible. It will help to attend worship and break bread and we can awaken our relationship with prayer.

Without this relationship, our hymn says it well "Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing"

Without the consistent attention to God, where are we? He in us and we in Him is our life-giving reality."

†Amen