

Easter Vigil
All Saints' Church

March 31, 2018
Year B

The Story of Creation: Genesis 1:1-2:4a
Israel's Deliverance at the Red Sea: 14:10-31; 15:20-21
The Valley of Dry Bones: Ezekiel 37:1-14

Romans 6:3-11
Mark 16:1-8

*Alleluia, Christ is Risen.
The Lord is Risen indeed, Alleluia.*

My sister Karie and I are only a year apart; we are close like twins. I don't remember life without her. She couldn't pronounce my name and called me YoYo. I have no idea how she came up with this nickname, but I loved it- as sweet, loving, and fun. We have lots of pictures of us swinging on the rusty backyard swing set, running while holding hands, riding on the back of our big dog, Dempsey, and making sand castles. Idyllic, innocent and trusting. We were each other's right hand.

And then we went to school.

One day, when I was in first grade and Karie was in kindergarten, she came running up to me during recess with some exciting news, calling out, "YoYo, YoYo," and immediately all my friends laughed and pointed and made fun of her by calling out, "baby, baby." I can remember it as if it were yesterday. She stopped dead in her tracks, her big blue eyes filling up with tears, with her head cocked looking to me for an explanation. I was both embarrassed by her innocence and upset by my friends' meanness. I felt stuck and did/said nothing.

That afternoon on the school bus, we were sitting together as was our custom, and my sister took my hand and tenderly whispered, "Jamie" for the first time. And I began to cry, over her love, my cowardice, our grief in an innocence lost, and in our growing up.

Eugene Peterson, one of my favorite biblical scholars, tells us that growing up and living into our lives is made up of thousands and thousands of tiny incidents just like this story I told you, which are full of seemingly tiny choices, and yet not.

We all know these precious moments that are simultaneously full of slow work that cannot be hurried and urgent work that cannot be procrastinated. We are told by our society that slow and urgent are not compatible; they cancel one another out.

Yet, in a life of faith, patience and urgency are yoked. Always. Urgent as it is for Jesus to usher in the Kingdom of God, there is no hurry. There cannot be any hurry. Impatience is antithetical to a congruent life.¹ And Jesus waits for us, as if for an eternity.

Tonight's liturgy invites us to experience our life of faith, trusting in all the ways patience and urgency are yoked.

We begin in darkness, before the dawn of a stone being rolled away from a tomb, before the creation of Death Defeated. A fire is lit, and there is urgency- the first glimmer of resurrected life beckoning us to follow the Paschal candle into the mystery of our faith, into the story of our salvation. We can't rush. The rising smoke from burning incense leads the way. We light candles pew by pew, trusting in the shadows of light.

A darkened church is like a thin place where the veil between eternity and "the now" wears weak. Or like the hot white spaces between the letters of any word which now does the telling. Or like the footsteps of our lives, which are girded by the ground of All Being, never by our own walking. We are almost lost, our bearings gone, would it not be for the Light of Christ proceeding ahead of us.

And then through smoke and shadows, we hear our story. Our faith story: The Source of all Life creates out of chaos, flinging stars to the ends of the world, shaping the sun and the moon, bringing forth fishes and fowls, beasts and birds to soar and seek, and then lovingly creates humankind, like a key to the lock of creation in which we learn *to turn* in love and life. **Good news: God can step into the void and chaos of our lives and bring us into a new creation.**

And then an enslaved people walk through the splitting of the Red Sea into a way of freedom, defeating the pharaohs of hate who ensure the safety of a few by sacrificing the hopes of the many. **Good news: God can make a way out of no way.**

And then our dry and brittle bones, crying in the valley of wilderness, with no flesh or sinews, are suddenly with a noise, with a rattling, coming together, bone to bone, breath to breath- to live to cry, to dance, to eat, to drink, to be merry and to hope again in a future. **Good news: God can open graves, no matter how deep.**

¹ An interview with Eugene Peterson about his book, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology*.

Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome are walking to the tomb with spices to anoint Jesus' body, to give him a proper burial, to cleanse him, and to wrap him lovingly with a shroud to cover his broken and bruised body.

They are unhinged from all hope, almost lost, their bearings gone, except for the Light of Christ proceeding them. I imagine they are crying and praying and holding hands as they walk to the tomb. But instead of a stone, they find our story of faith. They find a young man dressed in a white robe, who tells them, "Do not be alarmed, you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look there in the place they laid him."

Look, dear women, at the cold stone, a place of life vanquished, crushed dreams in a tomb. Look carefully, and see that nothing is there. See the emptiness. Jesus is gone. This absence has been transformed. Emptiness is fullness. Desolation is consolation. Bad news is good news. Your tomb has become a womb, of new giving and of new receiving. Be kind and gentle to yourself, as living into *this turning of tombs into wombs* takes a life time to experience, a life time of patience and urgency yoked.

We are told that the women "flee from the tomb for terror and amazement had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

Of course, the women fled. The women were terrified and silenced, as any would be, and yet because we have this story, our story of faith, we know their silence did not last. They found their courage, the presence of the Living Lord within them, to give voice, to bear witness, to claim hope no matter the circumstances, to let go of their past, all the ways they were lost and lonely or left behind, to claim the Living Christ in our midst.

Our growing up and living into our lives is made up of thousands and thousands of tiny incidents which are full of seemingly tiny choices, and yet not. We are the Holy Hoard, being carried and shaped by the story of our faith and by God's urgency and patience yoked within us. We are all on the bus, somewhere along in our journey, and there, right next to us, is God's indwelling capacity to reach out and take our hand in love, and tenderly call out our name, as if for the first time.

Happy Easter! AMEN