

Great Vigil of Easter Sermon

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Trinity Church in the City of Boston

Holy Saturday

April 7, 2007

This is the night of awe. This is the night of hope, of new beginning, of everything made new. This is the night when the world becomes new again, a garden again. Ahh is the sound for tonight. Tonight is the night of Ahh, however you may spell it. It's like a baby's first vowel, for we are all reborn tonight and Ahh is our instinct for this night. Ahh is the first syllable of that word we will say and sing and shout over and over again for these next 50 great days. You know the word. Alleluia. Savor the Ahh. Savor that Ahhhhleluia. Alleluia, Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia.

This is a participatory sermon, ring your bells. (Laughter) Yes this is the night when the world becomes a garden again. It all began in a garden when God made all that is. You heard about it in Genesis. And God made everything very good, breathing and hovering over the waters, the primordial waters, that great cosmic soup like some unimaginable great sea bird, larger than the universe itself. The spirit the breath, the wind of God has been busy making a garden since the beginning of time. Ahh, is the sound of God's breath. Ahh, we say in response to that breath. And we say also, Alleluia, Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia.

But the ahh doesn't stop there. Light, not of sun or moon or stars or candles or electricity, but God's own light; the light of God's being and beauty. God's truth, goodness, love and lightening the darkness and lightening our minds, our spirits, our souls, all creation so ahh, is the sound of our breathing out after anything that's good and true and beautiful, anything that is of God. Ahh, we say. We also say Alleluia, Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia.

But it doesn't stop there either. The dome of the sky with it's beautiful blue, it's diaphanous clouds and huge thunderheads, it's rainbow of colors after rain, the waters gathered into seas and then the land slicing the waters, becoming islands and continents, mountains and valleys, seashores and riverbeds, and pond sides and back bays and Copley Squares. Ahh is the sound of deep breathing in of the blue of the sky, the palette of the rainbow, the glory of the clouds and the sheer wonderfulness of land to stand upon. Ahh. Alleluia, Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia.

But it doesn't stop there either. The plants, all those plants, grasses and flowers, trees, wheat fields and grapevines and olive trees and gardens. Eden, Gethsemane, and the amazing garden here all around us. That sprung up overnight since yesterday's darkness and death. Ahh, is the deep breathing in of the delicious scents of flowers, it's the deep breathing out as we see the glory of wheat fields and vineyards and mounts of olives all over the world and Ahh is the deep grateful sigh of satisfaction after we have supped, have been satisfied with bread and wine and our bodies have been healed and anointed

with oil. Ahh, we say and we say also, Alleluia, Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia.

But you know that it doesn't stop even there. There are the great lights, the sun, the moon, the stars, the deep beauty of sunrise slowly, imperceptibly dawning like the light coming up tonight here in the church. The gentle light of moon on water, laying out a beautiful path that seems to beckon us into the very arms of God. And the yet gentler light of stars, shining bright and distant, pinpricks of light, as if the darkness separating us from God's fiery heart has been pierced and the divine love and goodness is shining through. So, Ahh is the sound of our great delight and our gratitude for sun, moon, stars and for Christ. Alleluia, Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia.

And it goes on further. God made creatures. Creatures to bring us wonder, delight, warmth and amazement. Those mighty whales in the waters just a few miles away, whose majesty reveals some tiny glimpse of their majestic maker. But also, the lowly plankton, whose humility helps us see and believe that the God who made them is willing to be utterly humble, to become one of us. To live and die as one of us. And the loon whose mysterious call, calls us into deeper contact with the deep mystery of our God. Sounding beyond the cacophony of the noise that we make in this world. Or the gentle puppy curled up in our lap, inviting us to know and delight in the gentle companionship, the utter acceptance of the One who made both puppy and the One whose lap she graces. Ahh, the delight in the whales and the plankton, the loon and the puppy, Ahh. The good grace of the Gardener who's made all of this and brought it all into being. Alleluia, Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia.

And then last, but far from least, God planted God's own image of beauty, goodness and love in the garden in us; in Adam and Eve, our primordial ancestors, and every human soul from that time to this. Artists and scientists, artisans and farmers, garbage men and teachers, nurses and EMT's, mothers and fathers, kings and queens, peasants and slaves, bankers, lawyers and yes, even clergy, think of the face and the beautiful goodness and giftedness God placed in just one such person you've loved or who has loved you and say the Ahh of delight with me. Alleluia, Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed, Alleluia.

Now I wish I could make it stop there. I wish I didn't have to tell you the rest of the story. But you know; you know that it's not just a garden. You know the world isn't just a garden. Our readings tonight remind us of that. Our readings remind us that we carry not just the beauty and the goodness and the love of God's image, but that we have the capacity to enslave and oppress one another and that that didn't end in Egypt when the people of Israel escaped. We're still enslaved, you and I, by oppressive forces, political and economic; forces of racial prejudice and small minded tribalisms that say we're good and you're bad, we're right, you're wrong. We have a right to live and you are fit only for a dumping ground, like the place of the skull. A world where people are still sacrificed on wrong-headed altars of indecent gods instead of rescued by the powerful ram of love, Christ our Lord. The Christ who asks us to be His hands and feet of rescue, to help Him rescue all into the lives of dignity and freedom.

So how will their ahh, their ahh of pain and sorrow and our ahh of pain and sorrow be transformed back into Ahh? Who will help find a way to make their oppression into freedom, their ahh into Ahh? Well, it is Christ. It is Christ who finds that way, but as we just reviewed in our Baptismal Covenant, Christ asks us to join Him, join Him in transforming this overheated desert, this garden that we have neglected and abused, He asks us, "Will you help tend the dryness and thirst? Will you help find land and water for those who have no home, who have nothing to drink; will you help plant fields so that they can be fed? So that this desert can become a garden again? So will you? Will you and I help turn this desert into a garden again? How do we do it? The same way Christ did it. You know what He did. He met the stranger and made her friend. He met the one who was ill and reached out a hand to heal. He touched the one who was hungry and said, "Come to the mountainside and let me feed you." He touched the one who was outcast and said, "You belong in my band of followers." And He faced death, and found courage to face it so that we could help others and ourselves to know that death does not have the last word. Will you help Christ? For you see its not just Jane and Sean and Leslie and Piper that Christ asks to follow tonight? He asks all of us. He wants us to harrow up this world, this desert world, into a garden, just as He harrowed up hell and brought life out of death. Wouldn't you like the Ahh's to come back again? Wouldn't you like to be able to say Alleluia every day? And wouldn't you like everyone around to be able to say that? That's our task, this night, tomorrow morning, throughout the Great Fifty Days and every day. Ahh, did I hear you say you will? Ahh, don't you love that sound? It's the beginning of Alleluia.

So, think what a wonder this world will be if we were really willing to take up this holy task that Christ has entrusted to us. We, who are supposed to be His happy flock of Alleluia, Ahh breathing little Christs. Will you find the gift that Christ gave you in your baptism by virtue of the Holy Spirit, and find your way to make this desert a garden again? Will you plant Easter in some dark and dismal place? Did I hear you say, AhhI might? Christ will be with you and He will say, even if you can't, Alleluia, because He will know that He has risen in you. And you can be assured that there will be at least some of us here who will say Alleluia with you.

And so to practice, let's say, Ahhh. And now let's say Alleluia, Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia.

Amen.