

## Sermon Easter Vigil 2021

Coming to our celebration tonight, we are met with a wealth of efforts to describe the mystery we recall. In our liturgy tonight a profusion of word and symbol, rite and action converge on this most holy of nights. Our modern tendency to make things easy, to flatten things out, to dumb things down is here tonight resisted. We may be ambivalent or nervous about layerings, or depth, or responses which are not clear cut and easy to digest. But the event on which our entire faith hinges requires much more!

As the New Testament writers attempt to account for the Mystery of the empty tomb, they step back. In the face of the profound mystery of *encounter* with their once-dead but now-living Lord and friend, they find that all the usual categories of understanding life (and indeed death) inadequate. In encountering Christ risen they discovered that all the usual ways we make sense of the world and all the way things are (or should be) were stretched and in fact undone. They did recognize that something wondrous, terrible, and mysterious had occurred. But they discovered that it was totally unprecedented. It had never been experienced before. There was nothing to compare it to. But this mystery – however it was to be described and however it was to be understood – was known to be *true*. Witness to the risen Christ led to the firm conviction that the man Jesus had transcended death. *And that changed everything.*

To give expression to this central, defining mystery of faith, tonight we use everything at our disposal. Fire and candle, light and dark, music, song and chant. In silence. In oil, water, bread and wine. In Word and Sacrament. In Altar and Font. The best décor. The best clothes. This riot of symbol and imagery, a profusion of sacred word, sacred rite and sacred action, a layering so rich and deep, so profound and striking, so ancient and yet strangely timeless. This is the night of nights. This is the feast of feasts. And all this necessary - yes necessary – precisely because of the profound mystery being celebrated. In her wisdom Mother Church recognizes that we need to throw everything we've got to express the inexpressible, to show how everything is changed!

Our Lent may have been bread and water. Or at least, bread and water is all we deserve! But tonight, well tonight, is the night for champagne and oysters and caviar! This is a feast for a fine steak or a well stewed beef bourguignon, or more suitably, a roast lamb. An aged shiraz. And a rich chocolate gâteau as well!! Isaiah tonight has the idea: *Come to the waters, you who are thirsty, and he who has no money come buy and eat! Come buy wine and milk without money and without price.*

But in this richness, from this riot of colour and sound, amongst the profusion of word and image and symbol, one note – just one – to draw out. One small taste to savor. A note so small we might very easily miss it. It comes from early in our baptismal service as tonight we welcome with joy Alex and Jeffrey into Christ's holy Church. At the font, I make a simple request of their sponsors: *Name this Man*.

All that we are, all that makes us who we are, all our gifts and talents, all our failings and foibles, all our beauty and shame, our hopes and fears, our stories, our histories, is summarized and contained in our names. And all that *you* now bring to the font. All that we are we bring before God. *Name this Man*.

The resurrection changes everything. And at our deepest level, even how we understand ourselves. Even our names are brought to God. Alex and Jeffrey bring all that they are to the font not to remain as they are. In the bath of regeneration they are purged and purified, washed and cleansed. As Paul in his Epistle to the Romans tells us tonight, *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?* At the font Alex and Jeffrey will descend with Christ to his tomb. There, they put to death the old man! But, as Paul again says, *we were buried with him into death...so that as Christ was raised from the dead...we too might walk in newness of life*. United in Christ's death, we are promised then a share in his resurrection. The font for us both the womb and tomb. The place where the old man dies *and* the new man is brought to life.

For this reason, in our procession to the font, we invoke the great holy ones of God, the saints. In the Litany of the Saints, we invite heaven to our celebration! This is a family feast! We invoke *their* names, we call upon them, we ask them to be witnesses to this event. We ask them, *pray for us*. We name them because, at the font, at the spring of living water, you, Alex and Jeffrey, join their number, you become part of the family of God. And we invite the saints themselves to welcome you to the family.

*Name this Man*. No longer just Alex and Jeffrey. But Alex and Jeffrey, child of God, Alex and Jeffrey *a member of the household of faith*. Alex and Jeffrey called by Christ and set apart for him. You now no longer hold your own name. You also carry *Christ's* name. You are Christian. To mark this truth, after baptism, our candidates are signed on the crown of their heads with holy chrism. You are marked as Christ's. You become 'christs'. In other words, you now belong to Him. You become Alex the Anointed One.

Jeffrey the Anointed One. The oil is sweet-smelling and sticky. And this too is right. Our lives in faith an aroma to others. Our lives in faith not easy to wash out. The resurrection changes everything.

Some weeks ago, I was speaking to someone, newly come to faith, exploring with openness and delight the mysteries and wonders of believing. This person said to me that resurrection faith was like rustling amongst *the mess* of the dashboard of a car (we can imagine old catalogues and bills and fast-food wrappers) looking for your glasses. And finding your glasses you put them on. And - over the mess and to road ahead - finally being able to see clearly. This person said that even when you try to take off those glasses, you couldn't. *The way you had seen the world had changed.* Yes, Alex, you are quite right... Resurrection faith changes everything.

In the fourth prophecy tonight, Ezekiel tells the children of Israel that – forgiving the infidelity and profanity of his people – God will give them a new heart. *A new spirit I will put within you.* In Christ, by his glorious resurrection, we too are given a new heart, a new spirit. In Christ, by his glorious resurrection, we cannot see the world in the same way. In Christ, by his glorious resurrection, the way we see ourselves, our place in the world, the way we see those around us, the way our values and priorities are formed, the way we regard the poor and vulnerable changes! The way we see our destiny and purpose. A new Heart. A new spirit. By light we can see. The psalmist tells us, *you are the fountain of life, in your light we see light.* This is what's possible.

Despite what the gospel intimates for us tonight. We strangely hear how the women, who, discovering the empty tomb, and receiving the angelic message that Jesus was indeed raised, departed in trembling and astonishment! What's more, they say nothing because they were afraid! An understandable response, but a strange way to end the story! But of course, it doesn't end there! If that was the case, we wouldn't be here! This initial bewilderment and fear gives way to something else. Yes, the story as we hear it tonight appears to be left open-ended, incomplete, even. But open-ended and incomplete so that we, yes even we, *can add our names to that story.* So now, brothers and sisters, we call on the whole company of heaven. Now, we invite Jeffrey and Alex to the waters of new life and the table of God's household. Now, with all the faithful from every time and place, their *names* are added to the Book of Life. Jesus' resurrection truly changes everything. Even us. And encountering him, saying yes to him, means our names can become part of the greatest story ever told. Amen.