

Genesis 1:1-2:4a
Exodus 14:10-31; 15:20-21
Isaiah 55:1-11
Ezekiel 37:1-14
Jonah 1:1-2:1
Daniel 3:1-29
Romans 6:3-11
John 20:1-18

Easter Vigil Sermon 2021

The Renewal of Creation

Holy Saturday is a day in our Holy Week Calendar that often gets forgotten. Maybe, because we are so overwhelmed when remembering the crucifixion of Jesus on Friday, that we want to skip right to the celebration of the Resurrection on Sunday morning.

Unfortunately, the disciples didn't have this option to choose from. They had to live through Saturday. Grieving at what seemed to be a failed movement. Hurting and wounded by the death of their dear friend and leader. Confused and wondering what to do next.

If we want to experience the full meaning that the worship services during Holy Week have to offer, we need to avoid the inclination to skip Holy Saturday. Instead, we are encouraged to sit with the disciples, grieving death. Grieving those moments in our lives and in our world where our brokenness seems to have prevailed.

Now during our Lenten and Holy Week journey this year we were invited to reflect on our relationship with God's creation. We were invited to reflect on the pain and suffering of God's creation. We were invited to reflect on where we may grow in our ability to take part in the healing and renewal of God's creation.

On this Holy Saturday we are invited to grieve with God's creation over the death of sections of our rain forest. We are invited to grieve with God's creation over the extinction of animal species (**Image**). We are invited to grieve with God's creation over the loss of viable land. We are invited to grieve with God's creation over the loss of clean air and water. We are invited to grieve with God's creation when lives are lost, because of natural disasters (**Image**). Lives that range from animal life to human life to plant life.

We are invited to grieve with God's creation over the death of Jesus. A death that didn't only impact humanity, but also the trees, the grass, the water, the soil, the rocks, the wind, the rest of the animal species. On this Holy Saturday we are invited to grieve with God's creation.

As we reflect on the readings we heard throughout this day, we reflect on how God's creation interacts with us. We reflect on how God's creation is impacted by our brokenness, but also, how God's creation is impacted by God's healing and renewing work.

From the creation story where we are created to be in relationship with the animals, the plants, the soil, the water, the air **(Image)**. To the Exodus story where the sea creatures and the waters witness and play a role in God's liberation of the Israelites from slavery **(Image)**.

From the promise that God's people will receive God's gifts of milk, wine, and rich foods, that come from God's life-giving creation. Gifts that are accessible to all in the Israelite community. Including the marginalized. To the promise of new life that Ezekiel prophesies after he receives a vision where God will breathe life into the valley of dry bones. Or in other words, the wind, the air, will liberate the Israelites from exile.

From the use of water, and then a big fish, to give Jonah some time to find his way back to God's path. To God's Son dancing with faithful believers in the middle of a burning fire.

From Paul's words that talk about God's promise that even though all of God's creation will die with Christ, God's creation will also rise with Christ. To Mary's encounter with one whom she thought was a gardener, but then ended up being someone who identified himself as the risen Christ. The one who will redeem all of creation. Or in other words, the one who will tend to and enrich the soil so new life can grow.

As we grieve with God's creation on Holy Saturday, as we reflect on our relationship with God's creation, we also hope with God's creation in the promise that through Christ we will experience healing and new life from our suffering and death.

When we gathered in vigil on Holy Saturday in past years we would gather at sunset, which acknowledges the breaking in of a new day. A day that will be very different than any other we have ever experienced. A day where we will reconnect to all the stories we heard, about God's promise of goodness and liberation coming to fruition.

From God reflecting on the goodness of creation. To the Israelites being freed from slavery.

From God promising the Israelites that they will return from Babylon. To actually hearing the decree of the Persian king that Israel was now free to return to their land. That God did indeed breathe new life on their dry bones.

From God rescuing Jonah from the belly of a fish so that the people of Nineveh could hear the good news of a merciful God. To God's Son dancing with the faithful

believers. Protecting them from the fire. Showing the King that God stands with God's people.

From Jesus rising from the dead. Appearing first to Mary Magdalene. Giving hope to women. To all marginalized people that they too have a part to play in God's plan for the world. To the early believers transforming the cross into a symbol of hope for God's people. Reassuring them that even though they may face death for continuing what Jesus started. That they will also rise with Jesus to new life.

The Easter vigil is an opportunity where we can listen to the hopeful promises of healing and new life. Where we prepare our hearts and minds for the Easter morning celebration where we see these promises come to fruition. Where the witness of the empty tomb. Where the witness of the resurrected Christ. Gives us hope and eyes to see where Christ's healing and new life are at work in God's creation yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

We gather here this evening around Word and Sacrament to hope in our future. To hope in God's creation's future. Lent helped us reconnect to the fragility of creation, and how we need to act for the health and wholeness of creation. Easter gives us the hope and vision to see a future where this health and wholeness is still possible. Despite what we hear from doomsday predictors. There is always hope through Christ Jesus for the healing and new life of everything and everyone in all of creation.

Easter magnifies this hope for us, and points us back to God's fulfillment of this promise of healing and new life that we witness in the darkness of the early morning. Where along with Mary, Peter, and the other disciple, we come to the tomb to pay our respects to Jesus. But instead, find only his linen. An empty tomb (**Image**), a couple of angels, and a supposed gardener who turns out to be the risen Christ who reveals himself to us by calling out our names.

Inviting us to go tell the others. Inviting us to be active participants in God's plan for the healing and renewal of all of God's creation.

Let us pray, loving God, we give thanks for the hope we receive in the witness of the resurrection of your Son. We give thanks that the risen Christ reveals himself to us wherever we grieve. Heal and renew creation wherever there is pain and death. Empower us to take up your invitation and be active participants in this healing and renewing work. **Amen.**

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