

# Sermons at Saint Paul's

*A Wellspring of spiritual; nourishment; A river of service in Jesus' Name*

Easter Vigil

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The Easter story is one of birth. Not necessarily a rebirth as in being born anew, it is a story of the birthing of a new creation. The birthing story of Easter is entirely different from the incarnation. In both stories, angels announce the turning point in human history. In both stories, women are pivotal in God's glorification among humans. At their core, the incarnation and resurrection stories are about life as given by God. In the incarnation, we tell of a God who became enfleshed in human form. In the Easter story, we tell of the miracle of a re-created world.

Because I believe in miracles, I hold the view that if you have not as yet experienced any miracle in your life, stories of God's re-created world may not resonate with you. If you were raised to consider reality as always being subjected to the laws of nature, the stories of God's re-created world would not make much sense to you. I experience a miracle every morning. I am keenly aware that my life is not given. And so if by a miracle my eyes open, I bless the God who wakes me up and gives me a chance to live another day. The morning sun reminds me of the resurrection-that life lives.

There is a story about the miracle of a re-created world. It is a world where you and I are linked together, not by any means of blood, but by a sacred trust in a love that is so unbounded that our failures cannot dim its light nor quench its thirst. F.D. Maurice lifts up the nature of this boundless love by asserting that the words of the creed "he descended into hell" affirm that "there is no corner of God's universe over which his love has not brooded."

This love makes possible the miracle of a re-created world. It is a world where we are fully alive, alive enough to listen to stories other than our own stories. It is a world where we are alive enough to realize that we do not control our own destinies, alive enough to realize that our resurrection is now, right here, right now, and that the joy of the resurrection is to walk, as Paul suggested, in newness of life. A walk which cannot be postponed to the future.

Understand that the story of God's people, the human story is replete with perversion. My story isn't perfect. Your story isn't perfect either. Sin has taken hold over us. It often feels like Jesus is still in the tomb. Our world is becoming a little dangerous by the day. It appears people are immune to the tragedies of their own actions. We cannot tell who is being honest and who is not. Everyone is anxious about something terrible happening. To where do we turn for solace? To whom do we go for comfort?

As devastating as the events of Good Friday, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the tomb early Sunday morning with only one expectation: to visit the tomb. The place of human perversion, betrayal, arrogance and pride. If human sin was crucified with Christ, they were buried with him in the tomb. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary who visited the tomb soon realized that life lives and that the tomb isn't where they are supposed to look for the living. For the one who was crucified is alive as he promised.

How perplexing for the women. How can this be? That the perishable and mortal body is no longer in the tomb? The God who brought into being the first creation, has through the resurrection of Jesus brought another creation into being. Jesus' resurrection reveals to us that God did not surrender the earth, but reconquered the earth, giving it a new future. A future in which those who affirm the resurrection of Christ will not withdraw from the world, nor become slaves to sin and the world, but will make present God's new creation in their lives and in the lives of others.

The story of Easter is about homecoming—all are meant to come home, to taste of God’s salvation. I missed my high school homecoming last year. I wish I was there to reminisce with my school mates about our time in school, to catch up on life and to share our hopes for the future. When I saw pictures on Facebook, I realized that I wasn’t the only one who couldn’t make it. A lot more of my classmates did not. Many of you have also been to several homecomings where you saw people you have not seen since you graduated from high school or college. Maybe you’ve made it to every single homecoming, maybe you’ve not. But whether you’ve made it or not, for St Chrysostom, no one is left out in the Easter homecoming. He says, “The first and last receive their reward. The rich and poor rejoice together. Abstinent and heedless honor the day. Those who have fasted and those who have not fasted rejoice together. Let no one bewail his poverty, for the riches of all have appeared. Let none sorrow for sins, for forgiveness shines forth from the grave. Let none fear death—for the death of the Savior has redeemed us. He who embraced death has stamped it out. He who went down to hell made hell captive...Christ is risen and life lives!” Life lives, indeed.

I often wonder why Jesus did not reveal himself to an impartial authority to certify his resurrection. It would have been much simpler, wouldn’t it? But if he had done that, how would you have believed? There would be required of us, no faith at all because we would have in our possession the documentary evidence. But faith requires no certainty, it requires the desire to leave the tomb with the news that life lives. And because life lives, we would champion a world that affirms the life of little Nathan and every other life.

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary after hearing the news, ran with fear and great joy to tell the disciples of the risen Lord. It must have been an overwhelming experience. They could not contain their joy, nor can we also contain our joy. For we know that news of the resurrection of Jesus brings about human transformation.

When we are transformed, we look at the world not through the prism of life in the tomb but through the prism of life outside the tomb. For life outside the tomb is one shaped by the reality that death cannot defeat the purpose of God, nor can it have the last word. Life outside the tomb is a life lived with a sense that sin and death cannot prevail over us. Life lived outside the tomb is one lived with grace and gratitude for a God who re-creates our world out of pure love.