

Easter Vigil 2022 Sermon

Genesis 1:1-2:4a

Exodus 14:10-31; 15:20-21

Ezekiel 36:24-28

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Luke 24:1-12

Preacher Mark Trotter points out the fact that everyone in the Bible is on a journey.¹ In the *Old Testament* they are journeying to the Promised Land. In the *New Testament*, they are journeying to the Kingdom of God in all its fullness. There are *some* books in the Bible, such as Exodus, that read like a travel journal. There are other books that give advice on how to get along on your journey, like the Book of Proverbs.

In the New Testament it is pretty much the same. Jesus said, “The Son of Man has no place to lay his head” – meaning that he was always on the move. He recruited people by saying, “Follow me,” without specifying a destination.

One of the central stories in the Old Testament is the one we just read a few minutes ago: the story of the people of Israel journeying from slavery in Egypt to freedom, through the parted waters of the Red Sea. In that story, God is with the Israelites as in “a pillar of cloud by day... and in a pillar of fire by night.” (Ex. 13:21)

The early Christians saw the Paschal Candle used in the Great Vigil of Easter as both representing and reinterpreting that pillar of fire leading the ancient Israelites through the dark night of that first Passover. This morning, in the dim light, we followed behind this Paschal Candle in a symbolic journey through the darkness of our *own* world and our *own* lives; led, not by a pillar of fire, but by the Light of Christ, from which we took our own symbolic light. The Great Vigil of Easter is our *Christian* Passover; and just as those ancient Israelites, in the *first* Passover, were on a journey to the Promised Land, so **our** lives in Christ are a *journey* – following, bearing, and shining forth the Light of Christ, living the Way of his Love.

We have just journeyed with Jesus through Holy Week. Last Sunday, we joyfully processed with him into Jerusalem, waving palm leaves. On Thursday night, we ate a Last Supper with him, and he washed our feet. We prayed with him in the Garden of Gethsemane. We watched as he was betrayed, denied, and forsaken by his own disciples, our forebears in the Faith. We saw how he was crucified, and how he forgave those who crucified him. We saw him buried in a tomb.

Shortly, we will read from the Gospel of Luke, and journey with the women who went to Jesus’ tomb that Easter morning to anoint his body. We will see them

terrified by the sudden appearance of two men in dazzling clothes announcing that Jesus had risen from the dead. We will see how the other disciples don't believe the women's testimony. In coming Sundays, we will journey with those disciples as the resurrected Christ appears to them, the realization of what truly happened slowly sinks in, and their lives are irrevocably changed.

Author George Weigel writes: "as [the disciples'] understanding of what had happened to Jesus and to themselves grew, they grasped that there had been an 'evolutionary leap' in the human condition. A new way of being had been encountered in the manifestly human but utterly *different* life of the one they met as the Risen Lord."² Easter brought about a *quantum* leap forward in the human journey!

Chevy, as you are baptized today, this principal Baptismal Feast Day of the year, it will not be the *end* of your growth in Christ; it will simply mark a new beginning. Holy Baptism has always been called "initiation," and the fact that the Church encourages us all to renew our baptismal vows today – and several more times during the year – tells us that we **need** to be reminded of what the Christian life is about – the **Way** of Love. And we take or renew our baptismal vows *together*, since not a one of us is on this journey alone. All the parts of the Body of Christ nourish, serve, and support each other, causing the whole Body to grow (see 1 Corinthians 12).

This is not to say that the Christian journey is always easy, or straight. Far from it! We move three steps forward, two steps back; we veer off in this direction or that. Easter does not solve all our problems, any more than baptism does. As Pope Benedict put it in his Easter message in 2010: "Just as the Israelites found the **desert** awaiting them on the far side of the Red Sea, so the Church, after the Resurrection, always finds history filled with joy and hope, grief and anguish. And yet this history is changed [by Easter]... it is truly open to the future."³

Ken, Martine, and Chevy, in a few short months you will enter an exciting new stage in your **family's** journey. You have blessed us immeasurably while you have journeyed among us, and we have all grown as a result. You will be sorely missed! Yet, the bonds of love that have been formed between us know no distance.

And Christ Church, itself – this parish family – is also on a journey, entering a Season of Discovery. The landscape of Christianity in America has been rapidly changing, and the pandemic has only accelerated that process. Churches such as ourselves face an uncertain future. The path that our journey will take going forward is unclear. But then, the path that lay ahead for those *first* disciples that *first* Easter was **radically** unclear. They knew that their lives would never be the same again, but they could not imagine **how** the future would unfold. What *was* certain was that they were "Followers of the Way," as the Book of Acts calls

those first Christians. Followers of the Risen Christ, living *in* Christ and *as* Christ in this world.

And so are we. So are we.

Even Martin Luther – whose teachings were made into set creeds and catechisms to be memorized – even Martin Luther saw the Christian life as an evolving journey. Luther wrote, “This life [in Christ...] is not righteousness, but *growth* in righteousness; not health, but healing; not being, but becoming... We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it. The process is not yet finished, but it is going on. This is not the end, but it is the road.”⁴

Our life in Christ, as the Great Vigil of Easter dramatically depicts, is not the end; it is the road. May we continue the journey, following the Risen Christ, and evermore growing in his Way of Love.

AMEN

- 1 Mark Trotter, Christian Globe Networks, Inc., 2007
- 2 “The Easter Effect and How it Changed the World,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 30, 2018
- 3 https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/urbi/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20100404_urbi-easter.html
- 4 Martin Luther, *Defense and Explanation of all the Articles* (1521), LW vol. 39.