
Isaiah 55: 1-11

The Great Vigil of Easter / Year A

22 March 2008

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Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price... Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. (Isaiah 55: 1, 6-7)

It is quite unfortunate in some ways that we have a perspective that Jesus' first disciples did not have. You and I know how this drama unfolds; we know that he rises from the dead. But on that sad and dark Sabbath evening his disciples had no clue. They were left trying to pick up the pieces of their shattered lives. How vulnerable they had been, how foolish they must have felt having gone all in with a man who was now stiff and cold inside the tomb. They trusted in his power, the power he used to heal and save others, the power he used to raise his friend Lazarus from the dead, yet in the end all they could hear replaying in their minds over and over again were the taunts from the crowd, "He saved others, let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, his chosen one. "

A couple of weeks ago I spoke to you about the Babylonian exile of the Jewish people. In 587 BC, the Babylonians attacked Judah and utterly destroyed Jerusalem and the temple taking the Jewish people off into exile to Babylon. The people of Judah had lost it all, the land promised by God to their ancestors, the temple, where God's glory was known and the people's identity was supremely manifested, it was all gone. It was a moment that was captured by the grieving soul who wrote the Old Testament book of Lamentations. Speaking on behalf of his people he writes;

I have become the laughingstock of all my people, the object of their taunt-songs all day long. He has filled me with bitterness, he has sated me with wormwood. He has made my teeth grind on gravel, and made me

cower in ashes; my soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is; so I say, "Gone is my glory, and all that I had hoped for from the LORD." The thought of my affliction and my homelessness is wormwood and gall! My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me. (Lamentations 3:14-20)

There is no doubt in my mind that Jesus' disciples prayed through the Lamentations and made them their own as they gathered together to consider all that had gone wrong in the previous 48 hours.

You and I may know how this drama ends, but tonight we begin in darkness; we begin in that place that greeted the disciples on the day following the crucifixion and death of their Lord. For I ask you, how is it possible for us to truly understand the depth of glory that Easter brings without first beginning here in the tomb, in the darkness? For so much of our life is lived there in the midst of the world's pain and confusion, prejudice and tragedy. We begin in darkness tonight as a reminder that darkness is where we would remain always if it were not for the unfathomable grace of God.

Even that grieving soul who was looking down upon the smoldering ruins that used to be Jerusalem, even he knew that the dark days would end. Again, speaking on behalf of his people, he writes;

But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. (Lamentations 3:14-25)

God's people survived the exile; they were freed 48 years later in 539 BC and allowed to go home, back to Jerusalem. They rebuilt their holy city and they rebuilt their holy temple and the glory of God shone once again.

On that first Easter morning, the disciples were awakened by one of their own, Mary Magdalene, shouting as she ran, "I have seen the Lord, I have seen the

Lord.” Indeed for the disciples, with that testimony, the darkness had been lifted. How it all took place didn't matter; all the disciples knew was that Jesus did have power over death, that he did have the power to heal and to save and their lives and dreams did not have to lie in the smoldering ruins of Good Friday.

The reading we heard read tonight from Isaiah speaks such profound truth, not only to the people of Judah as they ended their exile, for that is who it was originally written for, or to the disciples as they learned of Jesus' resurrection, but to us.

“Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat!. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.... Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live.... Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55: 1, 2b-3a, 6-11)

We begin this evening in darkness, but we don't end it in darkness. Soon the lights will come on and we will shout with great joy, Alleluia, Christ is risen, the Lord is risen indeed; alleluia.

In Jesus Name; Amen.