

Sermon
Holy Saturday: A Vigil for Easter
March 30th, 2024
Church of the Ascension, Ottawa
The Reverend Victoria Scott

The rhythm and movement of Holy Week has carried us through a sacred rhythm that beats in our spiritual lives: a rhythm of death, burial and resurrection. We've felt it more intensely this week so that we can remember this rhythm in all our weeks.

We began with celebration on Palm/Passion Sunday, and we felt tension begin to ripple and hum underneath that celebration and jubilation. We gathered on Maundy Thursday in the same way Jesus gathered with those he loved, and we prepared for crisis and for dying with foot washing and with bread and wine. We stood at the foot of the cross yesterday and felt the anguish, the sorrow, the suffering, as Jesus refused to meet violence with violence. We recalled what happened in that refusal: the force of that violence against Jesus crushed him. It nailed him to the cross. We felt the stretch as Jesus showed us that there is third way, a middle way that neither fights from a power position nor flees in denial but holds it all until new forms of life and healing emerge.

Richard Rohr says that "Resurrection" is another word for change, but particularly positive change—which we tend to see only in the long run. In the short run, it often just looks like death. We paused, yesterday and today, in what looked like death.

We paused as all the rhythm and hum of this week stopped. We paused in silence, in emptiness. We paused, trusting that behind the wood of the cross and in the darkness of the tomb there was new light and life. We paused, trusting that the heartbeat of God continues to beat a rhythm of love.

We kindled new light tonight, at the back of the church. We've seen this place in the glow of the Paschal candle and held flickering flames of that new light. We've heard stories of our faith – the covenant with Israel, Paul's assurance that in our baptism we are dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. And then, our Gospel passage this evening. I'm always struck by the running in this passage from John's Gospel. Mary, having come to the tomb and finding the stone rolled away, runs to tell the

disciples, and then Peter and the other disciples run back to the tomb. always feel the rhythm of the running as percussive, panicky. The disciples don't understand what the empty tomb means, and they return to their homes. Mary doesn't, though. She stays, weeping. And in that pause, in that stillness, she sees angels, and then she encounters Jesus. This shows us the power of pause, of stillness. It shows us that in the pause, there is a different rhythm: a rhythm of Resurrection. The heartbeat of God, beating that rhythm of love, inviting us to match the rhythm of our lives with it. It doesn't say that Mary ran back to tell the disciples of her experience. It says that she '...went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"'. This feels to me like she went gently, steadily, her feet beating a rhythm of love on the ground to match the heartbeat of God.

I love the rhythm of this Vigil. Tomorrow morning in this place will have a rhythm of unbridled celebration and joy: a gift for us to celebrate that Christ is risen and to fill this place with songs and prayers and praise! We celebrate that tonight, too, but there is a different cadence, a different feeling to it. We've had time to let the other rhythms of this week settle. With the flicker of candles, with the rising of incense, with Mary's experience at the tomb, we've felt the movement from death to life. We let it sink in and settle in us that what looked like death was change and transformation. We let it sink in that Christ is risen, that love is stronger than death, and the heartbeat of God continues to beat in us and in all of creation. Jesus's suffering, death and Resurrection changed everything: it showed us that nothing is impossible with God.

In a few moments, we'll renew our Baptismal vows. Our Baptismal promises are our promise to trust in the power of love and not to give in to love of power. They are our promise to seek a middle way, a third way as we journey through life, neither fighting from a power position nor fleeing in denial as we face violence and injustice and oppression in ourselves and in the world but holding it all until new forms of life and healing emerge. They are our promise to move to the heartbeat of God in our lives.

There is a rhythm of Resurrection. It's beating in us, and it's pulsing through all of creation. Remember that. Hear it, feel it, and move to that rhythm this night, and always. In Jesus name. Amen.