

Saturday, April 4, 2026
Great Vigil of Easter (Year A)
Genesis 1.1—2.4a; Exodus 14.10-31, 15.20-21; Ezekiel 37.1-14;
Romans 6.3-11; Matthew 21.1-11
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“Making Things New”

The Great Vigil of Easter is, from start to finish, the story of things being made new. Or making new things. Consider how we started the service—in the courtyard with the lighting of what is called the “New Fire.” A symbol of what is to come. The unfolding of the story of how Christ, through his resurrection, is the light of life who has been victorious in overcoming the darkness of sin and death. By the light of this New Fire we processed into the darkened church, as into a darkened and empty tomb. The light of this New Fire dispelling the darkness, just as the glory of Christ’s resurrection would have dispelled the darkness of his three-days’ tomb. But this story of new life made possible, made real, by the Risen Lord is not the beginning. Rather, this new life we celebrate this night is the culmination thus far of a series of things being made new. A mere sampling of which provide the scriptural framework that undergirds not only our Great Vigil celebration, but our very existence as God’s Creation.

Every one of our scripture readings this evening documents key events, seminal examples, of God at work making new things and making things new. Of course, none of this is possible without the events recorded in our first Vigil reading: the Story of Creation. The account of how God, out of a formless void, created all that is. Systematically proceeding through the various stages of creation. On the first day, quite appropriately for our Paschal celebration, as well as out of necessity to life itself, beginning with the command, “Let there be light.” Proceeding to the creation of the sky on the second day. Then creating, on the third day, the earth, with land and oceans. The fourth day lightening the sky and the earth with the sun, moon, and stars. With the basic structure of earth complete, the fifth day saw the creation of living creatures to fill the seas and the air. And finally, on the sixth day, God created all the animals of the earth, with what he considered to be the crowning achievement. The creation of those made in the image and likeness of God himself: humans. Charged with being fruitful and multiplying and having stewardship of all that God had made. And at every step along the way, following each day of creation, God proclaimed that it was good. Until the end of the sixth day, when “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.”

In the fullness of time, Abraham captured God’s attention as being particularly righteous. The descendants of this one man, becoming God’s Chosen, with whom God established a covenant. That they would be his people and he would be there God. These people, the Israelites, eventually found themselves in slavery in Egypt. But even in slavery, God did not forget them. Our second reading recounts the liberation of the Israelites, fleeing from their Egyptian enslavers. The epic drama of the crossing of the Red Sea, whereby the Israelites begin their journey to freedom. The beginning of what will be a forty-year journey in which the Israelites will be re-formed as God’s Chosen People, where their relationship with God will be renewed, in preparation for settling in the land promised to them.

Centuries after settling in the land that would, in the course of time, become known as Israel and Judah, these people would again be displaced, this time by conquering empires. Our third

reading of the Valley of Dry Bones presents a vision given by God to the Prophet Ezekiel during the Babylonian Exile. The desolate valley strewn with dry bones representing the hopeless state of Israel, now in exile. They have become spiritually dead, with the people scattered, just like the bones in the vision. The vision is not one of resurrection of dead individuals, but rather the restoration of a dead people, a dead nation. The vision prophesies the physical and spiritual restoration of God's people, the bringing the nation of Israel back to life and returning them to their own land. Their nation and their relationship with God being given new life.

Each of our Vigil readings providing a record of key events in the life of God's people, first created, and then continually re-formed and made new as God's people when circumstances required. Each event part of God's ongoing and ever evolving efforts to establish, sustain, and deepen relationship with us, his beloved children.

Undoubtedly, the most radical and significant event in the ongoing life of God's people is what we witness in our Gospel reading: the account of the resurrection of Jesus. This event being the culmination of—or rather, the next step in—the continual development and perfection of relationship between God and humankind. The event that is the epitome of what it means for things to be made new: resurrection. New life.

As we heard in the Gospel, Mary Magdalene and “the other Mary”—whoever that is, although likely not the mother of Jesus, as she would have been described as such—go to the tomb on the day after the Sabbath. Unlike the reports in the other Synoptic Gospels, they do not bring ointments or spices to prepare Jesus' body for a proper burial. They know Joseph of Arimathea already cleaned and prepared the body, wrapping it in a clean linen cloth for burial. As Matthew reports it, or at least implies, they are there for another reason. They have come just to visit the tomb. Perhaps to pay their respects, as we would in our own day. Undoubtedly to grieve the loss of their teacher and their friend. But perhaps there was another reason. Jesus had foretold that he would be raised on the third day. Today is that day. Perhaps they have come in anticipation, to witness his being raised. To witness this new thing that was to be done.

When they arrive, the tomb is still sealed, the stone still in place, as it had been these three days. “And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.” A dramatic sign indicating that in this act of resurrection, God is bursting into the world in a new way. In a way even more dramatic than before, when God came into the world in the form of a baby, born of a woman. God is acting at the boundary of life and death, the boundary between the garden and the tomb, separated by a stone, doing something altogether new. In this act of resurrection, God was making all creation new. The ultimate sign of divine triumph, indicated by the angel of the Lord sitting defiantly atop the stone. Divine power triumphing over the earthly power of empire, represented by the soldiers guarding the tomb shaking in fear and “becoming like dead men.”

The angel announces to the women what they have come to observe, that they have come to verify: “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.” Providing them with physical proof. Matthew tells us these two woman were present at the tomb when Jesus' body was placed in it by Joseph of Arimathea. They witnessed him sealing the tomb. Roman guards were present these three days. The tomb was still sealed when they arrived. And now,

they are the first to enter and see that it is empty. They are the first to be witnesses to this new thing that God has done.

The angel then tells the women, “Go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’” This angel, speaking on behalf of God, is commissioning these two women to proclaim the resurrection message. To proclaim that God had done something new, the likes of which has never been done before in the history of humankind.

Upon being commissioned, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary leave the tomb “with fear and great joy.” Likely fearful because of the unknown nature of what has happened. Perhaps fearful that no one will believe them. But all this overshadowed by the joy they are feeling that Jesus has indeed been resurrected. He is no longer dead. He has new life. He is new life.

And then, as they set off to find the disciples to deliver the good news, to proclaim their witness to the resurrection, they receive the ultimate proof. “Suddenly Jesus met them and said, ‘Greetings!’” After a tender moment of the women greeting their resurrected Lord, he reiterates the angel’s message. Jesus also commissions the women: “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

If Jesus is here in Jerusalem and the disciples are here in Jerusalem, why not go to them immediately? Why wait for them to make the several-day trip to Galilee before seeing them? Although, in a way, it makes sense. Galilee was where it all began. Jesus was raised in Galilee. That was where he started his ministry, where he called his disciples, where he preached, taught, and healed, where he fed the multitudes, and so much more. While his ministry took him throughout Galilee and Judea, he always returned to Galilee. To the heart of his life and his ministry. What better place to reunite with his disciples and to commission them for their new life as those who follow and proclaim the Risen Lord? Which is precisely what he does when he eventually reconnects with them. Matthew’s Gospel ends with the Great Commission: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the ages” (Mt 28.19-20). Their actions being the beginning of new life for countless individuals. His promise to support them in this new life to which they are called and commissioned.

Our New Testament reading from Paul’s Letter to the Romans specifically addresses what follows from this Great Commission. Focusing on baptism, the means by which those who seek to follow Christ are joined with him not only in his death, but also in his resurrection. Paul’s words providing a summary of our understanding as to how we participate in and benefit from Christ’s resurrection. That through baptism, we are all made new creations in Christ, in which sin and death no longer have dominion over us. The ongoing act of God making things new. As Paul puts it, “so we too might walk in newness of life.” Giving us and all who follow the Risen Christ the opportunity and the means to be co-creators in God’s ongoing project of making things new.