

Easter Vigil, Yr A, 042411
All Saints Episcopal Church

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Happy Easter to all of you! This is absolutely my most favorite service of the year - better than Christmas Eve, better than All Saints Day, even better than Pentecost in Washington Square! I love it because there is so much going on in this service - fire, water, babies, smells, bells, music - something to engage all five of our senses.

Oh - and great stories, too. It wouldn't be the Vigil without them.

Have you ever been to a family reunion? Does anyone have family reunions anymore? If not, maybe you've been to one of your school class reunions. At any rate, what happens at reunions? Our family comes together - some folks we see often and some we only see at reunion time, but still family, nonetheless. And we do just what we are doing here: we fire up the grill or lay a fire in the fire pit; there might be a pool or some larger body of water involved; we bring the newest additions to our families and catch up on whether they sleep all night long or how many teeth they have. We smell the familiar smells of Uncle Gene's aftershave and Grandma's lavender perfume and the wonderful jambalaya my cousin cooks in a huge cast iron pot. We eat and drink together. My Aunt Mary Alice plays the piano and my daddy and his oldest sister do the Charleston in the living room after the rug has been rolled up.

Oh - and the stories! There's the one about the time that 2 of daddy's sisters tried to hang him while they were playing outside. Or the stories about some great-great-somebody who was a circuit-riding Methodist preacher in Mississippi. Or the time I aimed my cork-on-a-string gun I'd gotten at the circus at my great aunt Sally (who was very old), and when I pulled the trigger and the cork fell out, she grabbed her chest and fell out of her chair onto the floor! She was fine, just playing along but I was in a lot of trouble!

The stories we tell about our families - whether they are about our individual families or about our church family - are how we know who we are and whose we are. And just like our individual family reunions, we come here together once a year to remind ourselves of who we are as the family of God.

Our identity as the children of God is a very long story. It begins before time, when the Spirit hovered over the waters of chaos, and it never ends. So we pick out stories to help us see who we are - some very familiar and some not so much - and we see through those stories that we are God's creation, God's children - not perfect, but made in God's image - loved by God, redeemed by God, made whole and holy by God through the grace of God's Son and the healing power of God's Spirit.

It takes a long time to tell these stories.

There was once someone who said such wonderful things and did such amazing things that people just had to ask him who he was. One time when they asked him who he was, he said..."I am the Light."

It is his light that we followed into the church this evening. And we watched as his light grew bigger and bigger and filled the room. But even as the light spread throughout the building, the light that all the light comes from did not grow smaller. I wonder how so much light can come from just one light?

Then one more light was lit. At her baptism, we lit another candle and gave it to Olivia, and from now on, she can remember her baptism at the Easter Vigil as the day she received her light.

But then we changed our lights. We put out our flames. But you might have noticed that smoke rose from our candles and spread out into the room. So just because you can't see it anymore doesn't mean that it is gone. This room, Stirling Hall, home will be full of invisible light. Anywhere you go, there it will be. Your light. The light you received on your baptism.

You know, in many families, each child in the family has a certain job to do. David's job is to take out the trash. Susan's job is to feed the dog every day. All of us have to keep our rooms clean.

In the family of God, we, God's children, have jobs to do, too. All of us are to be the light of Christ to the world. All of us are to help push the darkness away with this light. Some of us have the job of shining God's light on the injustices of this world. Others of us have the jobs of bringing the light of God's healing touch to

those who are sick, of raising up those who are beaten down into the light of dignity, of giving God's empowering light to those who are poor and marginalized.

When we bring the light of Christ to the world like this, the light grows bigger and bigger and spreads around the whole world. And yet, this light that all the light comes from, will not grow smaller.

Let us keep that light shining as we return home tonight. As the Exsultet reminds us: May it shine continually to drive away all darkness. May Christ the Morning Star who knows no setting, find it ever-burning - he who gives his light to all creation, and who lives and reigns for ever and ever.