

Easter Vigil Year B 2018

I'm now sixty three years old, and if I've learned anything, I've learned one thing about life for sure....among all the things I've had to learn and unlearn, or of the things I failed to learn...there is one thing I have learned for sure...one thing I know; and that is that life never turns out the way we planned or expected it.... Such knowledge at least for me renders the notion that God has some particular plan for each one of us, absurd.... No matter how important we think our decisions are...we find, if we're paying attention, that we are being drawn into some far deeper imagining, that life has a peculiar logic, or illogic all its own; a random beauty if you will....Some things we thought were failures, turn out to be pivotal points of transformation....triumphs, successes, in hindsight, perhaps not as special as we thought....trials turn out to be sacred experiences in maturing. Life just doesn't happen the way we expect it to happen....We live in a world as the theologian Catherine Keller puts it of... *entanglement*....a world that is wrought by interdependency and relationship and infinite possibility....there is no such thing as autonomy...the individual never was...we are part of a larger organism....an organism larger than humankind itself...an organism over the eons growing towards a beguiling yet ambiguous end, or maybe just another beginning..., we an intimate, contingent part of this grand

process...Call us protagonists... protagonists in the high drama of life.....entangled in a logic that is no logic at all...but a song...a song of rich and swelling harmony, a song of resonant pathos....a song harmonic with tragedy and comedy...but a song still becoming, bearing the universe into being. The creation story is not the spoken word of God, but a song.....improvised from the very beginning....God singing the world into being.... The becoming of the world being improvised still.

In our gospel reading, the earliest of the four gospels...in Mark's cryptic and ambiguous resurrection account.... we hear a sacred refrain of this song, the one song...just there...almost hidden.... Perhaps between the lines; a riff of the ancient music from the source....not at all logical, but beautiful.... This day, we hear this joyful refrain, just on the heels of the passion narrative, this so-called epiphany of injustice, this horrific depiction of the evil we are up against... We have heard from Mark about the brutality of the world of power and patriarchy...the violence of the world of empire...torture and shameful death....A good and innocent man scape-goated to the malignant gods of power and envy and greed and control and predictability...logical gods, gods with a plan...Some women of Jesus' close knit fellowship have come to the tomb to wash and anoint the marred body of their mentor, teacher and friend....to lessen the shame of it all perhaps...

An all too common practice: the anointing of victims crushed and shamed by an evil destined for some rhyme or reason to be in creation alongside the good....that dark side of creation that devours its young.....and on the heels of this dark lament... an unexpected turn.

In between the lines... in the music, yes...there in the music... a strange chord.... unexpecteddissonant perhaps...perhaps not, maybe even familiar, maybe not...but surely not expected....a change of key perhaps...an improvisation in the way of things....something surely not what we'd thought....the story of the universe here takes a turn....a turn we didn't expect...Who will roll away the stone from the entrance to the tomb?... the women had been wondering....no small logistical problem to be sure....How will we anoint the dead, how shall we ever make shameless that which is shameful and degraded? And here the way of things changes....not what we thought at all.

I want to suggest that in reading this text...this narrative of the crucifixion and the discovery of the empty tomb...I want to suggest that here we pause and we look to our peripheral vision. The truth has a way of showing up just outside of plain view, on the periphery. Truth is like that. I want to suggest that amid this strange turn the protagonist of the story, quite unexpectedly, is now the young man at the tomb... We have had Jesus front

and center throughout this gospel, from his baptism to his death...but here, the unexpected....an improvisation in the way.... You remember this young man, right, from just a few lines before? He makes just a cameo appearance. He's kind of lost in the drama of the story. Shakespeare would name him a "rude mechanical." We first saw him in the crowd during Jesus' arrest stripped naked and shamed into cowardice...as far as we know he too could have been crucified...He was one of the many shamed, like Jesus...like all the shamed, stripped of his dignity. I am convinced that Mark is most concerned with the shame of it all, much more so than the death; because shame is more bitter...death is of the created order; one has to live with shame....And now just a few lines later *the turn*... the point of it all in this gospel narrative...We see this young man again, clothed in white of Baptism; baptism Mark's theme... He appears clothed in white announcing Jesus' resurrection, and reminding these terrified disciples that Jesus would go ahead of them into Galilee....into the place of ministry... that life goes on with meaning, with purpose.... And of course we learn the answer to the women's question of who will roll away the stone from the tomb: It was he who rolled the stone away.

This young man, the improbable protagonist, and now hero of our narrative, had been shamed and dispossessed and now he is clothed in the

white of baptism, the white of honor and dignity...empowered to witness to the gospel ministry that awaits his fellow disciples, that awaits us all... We, dear brothers and sisters are that young man... It is we who will roll the stone away from the tomb, setting the dead of our world free... It is we who carry resurrection life... we are the improvised Christ for our world....a new and quite unexpected way ahead...the universe taking an audacious turn towards its very perfection... We learn that Love vanquishes shame....the ministry that Jesus embodied, serving the good of the whole has, now quite differently from what we expected... has reinvented itself... It is now for the baptized to continue with this life of sacrifice...this sacrificial life that transforms our world and stands against all evil....And there, amid these lines of scripture...just there a resonant chord...unexpected...jazz-like....a resonant note that is at once unexpected but so very familiar....It, this note, has always been the Gist of the song...Have we forgotten, O sons and daughters of Man? Have we not heard it before?.....the note is Love borne by sacrifice...loving sacrifice that forever brings new life to the dead of our world....we hear it again...in the song, within the music... as if for the first time...and it is good news.....Go to Galilee we are told, the many Galilees of our world...the Galilees just off Government Street...Go to Galilee and feed the hungry....go to Galilee and clothe the naked...Go to

Galilee and relieve the thirsty...heal the sick...set right injustice...bring dignity....forgive.... be advocates for the voiceless...in short, brothers and sisters....go and raise the dead! The three we baptized last night, we will endeavor to teach them the song, so that they too will raise the dead. High expectations, you say? But that is what we've gotten them into. They have been entangled in the Love of God, and there is nothing so strong, so sustaining, so honorable... and there's no going back.

And still we must listen for the song... because the song is being improvised still...It comes unexpected and often vaguely familiar.... In paradox and in mystery, amid the wounds of the world....but we know its beauty...and therefore we know that it is true....we know that Christ is raised from the dead always....That is what we celebrate this day...that is something about which we must sing...about which we must be mindful...When it comes It will always be a surprise...and it will be accompanied by joy.....The prophet asks the eternal question, "Can these dry bones live O mortal"....O yes they can...and yes they will....they will forever live....and that is a song improvised still....that is a song worth singing.