**Easter Vigil Year A 2020**

I’m sixty five now. I have a Medicare card to prove it. Sixty five doesn’t seem as old as I used to think it was. And over those sixty five years I have learned a very important thing… and that is that the future never comes about the way we planned for it. Despite our expectations, our well-reasoned plans, our reliance on sound predictability… Things just never turn out the way we expected them to. One might presume that life is a series of random occurrences; that God created the heavens and the earth, and set them free to follow their own laws, of biology and physics, of nature, and reason. The Deists in our western history thought as much. We have found, in our experience, that our decisions matter as to the unfolding future, but not all that much. Sometimes good decisions fail at success; and sometimes bad decisions turn out for the good. Who knew? I have tried in my gathering years to be as open as I can to possibility…. Even unto astounding surprise.

But having said all that, there is something that we can rely on; something that will enable us to reckon with the future. I’ve been talking about it in my daily posts over the past three weeks reflecting on the lectionary. I’m speaking of the ‘pattern’; the pattern which gives coherence and dare I say beauty to the random iterations of fate. I call it a pattern, because it’s not a plan. It can’t be analyzed or quantified; but to be sure it can be counted upon. If the universe is God’s song, then the pattern is the harmonic theme upon which there are infinite improvisations; infinite variations. But the pattern holds; we have testimony to its persistence… and the pattern is this: That the way up is the way down…. Death is the mother of beauty…. Death is the womb of new life…. The pattern is that the universe is a cycle of death and rebirth. Death is not the end, but a transition into new and brave possibility.

Biblical history is the story of this pattern. The people of Israel, a nation favored by God, scripture tells us, meets calamity after calamity, death after death… but at each death, there springs forth hope, and a way ahead; “a new thing,” the scribes of Isaiah put it…. New life, in short. For the first century New Testament scribes, the story of Jesus is Israel’s story, a people’s story; that death is never the end… that God is forever improvising a new thing, a new way ahead. The church in its tradition has taught that the resurrection of Jesus implies that we too will be raised after our physical deaths. I hope that’s true. I hope there is a continued, wider consciousness of some sort after I’m dead… But the Gospel writers aren’t concerned with the so-called hereafter. They are concerned with Life as it is now; and therefore resurrection has everything to do with our earthly lives. It is the pattern of our being, as a people in the solidarity of community… solidarity in knowing that death is not our undoing, that Love is stronger, and that Love will persist and endure even when hope seems lost. Brothers and sisters, the pattern holds, because it is Love that is the pattern. Love persists and endures, and Love brims with gratitude, and love is courageous, and Love is open to the possibilities of this glorious creation in which we are privileged to live… and Love never dies. Love is forever.

In our Gospel reading two disciples, Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary come to the tomb. Matthew doesn’t tell us why… but Mark does in his Gospel. He says the women were there to anoint Jesus’ body. It is important for us to remember that Jesus was crucified and buried outside the walls of the city. That was meant to shame the victim of execution. A proper burial would have taken place within the walls, within the fellowship of the Holy City. The women are there at the tomb for one essential thing… to bring dignity. …They are models for our vocation. It is for us good people, to go into the tombs, the deathly places of our world and anoint the shamed and the lost; to bring dignity to the poor and the sick, and the disabled… to welcome home from disoriented wandering, the immigrant; to remember the incarcerated as our brother, our sister. Ours is to bring dignity and life to the dead of our world.

We belong to the pattern…. Christ is risen and he goes ahead of us to Galilee. Galilee, the place where it all began, the place of renewed ministry, and hope. Resurrection was not a once upon a time thing. It is a present reality. It persists still for all the dead of our world: the untouchable, the lost and the least. It will seek out the shamed and anoint them with the oil of gladness. Because that is what Love does. That is Love’s pattern…. And we are stewards of the pattern because we have been made for only one thing and that is to Love mightily. Bear, dear friends of God, in our bodies and blood the resurrection of Jesus so that the pattern will hold still, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be.