

Easter Vigil  
Sermon text: John 20:1-18  
Date preached: March 30, 2013

Grace to you and peace from God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN.

How does God go about saving the creation that He consistently called good? How does he deal with humankind, that he called “very good” yet fell into temptation and disobeyed his good law?

The events we celebrate this week are God’s answer. Were we to do the full vigil, we’d hear 12 readings of the Old Testament. And through those readings we hear God speaking a word of hope.

Even as God is describing the reality of what life will be like as sinful human beings, He declares hope for Adam and Eve. The word of hope in Genesis 3:15 are found in this address to the serpent, the tempter, the deceiver. “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

The hope in that verse is in the descendent of Eve who will come and put all things under his feet. He is described by the Apostle Paul as the second Adam. He is Christ. He is the Lamb who was slain.

In the reading from Genesis 22 it is Abraham who is told, “Take you son, your only son Isaac whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”

Abraham trusted in the Lord. He heard the word, difficult as that was for him. The word was a test of Abraham’s faith. Who does he love more, his son Isaac or God who delivered the promise that he and Sarah would bear a son.

Holding the knife high above his head, it is the Lord who intervenes again. “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld you son, your only son, from me.”

Nearly two thousand years after this event, it would be God the Father, who would not withhold his only begotten son. The spotless Lamb of God lays down his life as the sacrifice for our sins. He dies that we might live.

In the journey of the Israelites out of slavery from Egypt, it was the Lord who provided for their safety. It was the Lord who created a way through the sea for His chosen people. It was the powerful water of the

mighty Red Sea that drowned the pursuing evil of Pharaoh and his army. Once again, God's people are delivered.

This same God seeks people to come to repentance from their sins. To that end He sent prophets such as Jonah. It took a while for Jonah to do what the Lord asked of him. How indicative that is of us? How many times might we have heard the Word of God and said, surely not I Lord.

I don't recall hearing of anyone since Jonah being returned to God's work by spending time in the belly of a large fish. However, there are times when we face circumstances of our own doing that cause us to realize, God is right.

In uniting our will to God's own will, the Word of God does what He desires it to do. God's Word calls people to repent, receive forgiveness and amend their lives.

These texts and the Old Testament in its entirety, point to the one who has come to save us. Born of a virgin, Jesus entered the world in humility. Riding on a colt, Jesus entered Jerusalem in humility. In humility, he endured the insults, punishments, torture, death, and the very depths of hell to save us.

On this night at an hour unknown to us, Christ was called forth from the grips of death and hell. God raised him up.

Standing before Mary and eventually before the disciples and hundreds of other followers, they will see fulfilled what was spoken by Job, “For I know that my Redeemer lives.” Not only does Jesus live, but the last day will come when again from the prophet Job, “after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.”

Simply put, the day will come when we too will be raised to behold the glory of the risen Christ who gives us victory over death. Through Christ, we can say with the Apostle Paul,

“Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

As we live in these days, we cling to the truth of God’s Word that holds us in true faith, that we are saved by his grace, free to love and share the good news of Christ victory. AMEN.