

The Great Vigil of Easter

Year C

RCL

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Even with our plugged-in lives, connected all the time to information at our fingertips, we need help remembering. Grocery lists, what the members of our families or friends are doing, our tasks and responsibilities at work. Our time is so full, we struggle to remember what's next, what we ate for dinner the night before, or the names of strangers we might meet. Surely, when we come to the end of our day, we remember the highlights, but scientifically speaking, we normally remember bad experiences better than the good due to the way our emotions influence how we process those events. To put it another way, bad memories are more resistant to decay- especially if our bad memories include a large infusion of pain. After our grief subsides in due time, we might forget it day to day, but when critical points happen in our lives that truly hurt us- tearing away at very our souls,

they can be triggered later on down the road, as if no time had passed at all.

Tonight, on this Easter Vigil, in the words of one of my favorite Lenten devotions, we “Pray, Love, and Remember”. Former Dean of Westminster Abbey, Michael Mayne reminds us that “These three words – pray, love, remember – seem to sum up the essence of the Christian life, and none more so than ... the word remember ... for to be re-membered is our destiny.’ These powerful principles of our faith are highlighted tonight in shadows and light, in new fire and the cool waters of baptism, in reuniting ourselves to Christ and to one another.

Even though we don’t have any scriptural evidence of what Jesus’ disciples were doing while he was in the tomb, it’s probable they were praying in addition to their wailing, mourning, and grieving. We can imagine some of the prayers to God: Why did you have to die so soon? We have so much more to talk about. He was our brother. He was our friend. It wasn’t supposed to end like this. In the haze of mourning, stories of his

life and death would be shared over and over again. Let us not forget one detail of Him who came for us; they might have shared with one another.

But they did forget one detail. And it's an important one. It's so important that when the women came to the tomb on that first dawn, they were perplexed that Jesus' body was missing. Jesus predicted not only his death, but his resurrection three times, yet the women did not remember. They couldn't call to mind those important words he shared with them. Important words to not only invite them into his death and resurrection, but they were words that could have given them bountiful hope in their grief. Was this really supposed to end like this? Jesus said it would be so, if only they remembered.

On this most holy night, in which our Lord Jesus passed over from death to light, the church invites her members to remember. Sing now, for weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes in the morning. This is the night when God brought our ancestors out of slavery and oppression, delivering them through the Red Sea. This is the night when all are restored to grace. This is the night which brings peace and concord, peace which

the world so desperately needs. This is the night where Jesus destroyed death, and death has no dominion over us anymore.

Remember, Jesus said his death would happen, but also remember that he said he would rise again. Remember, that in our baptisms, we are unified with Christ Jesus, not only in his Death, but in his Resurrection.

Remember, this freedom and salvation from brokenness and pain is for all as it brings deliverance from social injustices. Remember, in the darkness of Creation, God said let there be light.

The reality of resurrection though is that it is almost as hard to wrap our minds and hearts around as the reality of grief. Once reminded, the women at the tomb became the first to proclaim the good news, as they ran to tell the apostles. But the twelve couldn't remember either. They thought what the women were telling, translated from the Greek, was a bunch of baloney. Full of utter and total nonsense. And it is. Resurrection makes no sense whatsoever. But, God had other plans for us. Remember the stories of our foremothers and forefathers, of patriarchs and matriarchs. God continually reached out, time and time again, even though we

continually pushed by, distanced ourselves. But, resurrection is a truth that is just as important to the living as the dead. God's love is almost too hard for us to welcome. It's unfathomable how great God's love is for us.

It's easy enough to remember these great Biblical stories of redemption and resurrection. It's harder to remember resurrection living, being an Easter people in the midst of our daily lives. When we have been put through the ringer. When illnesses surround us and attack our family members. When violence hangs heavy on our world and in our hearts. When the need for good news is so, so great. But Jesus knows our suffering and pain- he walked them just as we do. The burdens that we and the world carry are as unspeakable as the grave which Jesus faced. We don't forget what burdens us, but we do remember how God is present in the midst of them.

On this most Holy Night, I invite you to remember Resurrection Moments. Moments where God brought you back to life. Moments where you've experienced God working in life-giving and life-changing ways.

Remember and don't forget- Death has been destroyed. Alleluia, Christ is
Risen! The Lord is Risen indeed. Alleluia!