

The Church of the Holy Cross
The Great Vigil of Easter 2011
Holy Baptism

Primal Power of the Easter God

Tonight we are moved from darkness into light. We hear the old story of a God who breathes life into the darkness of nothing but dust—of speaking a Word and there was light. The story of a God who brings people from the darkness of slavery into the light of freedom.

Tonight the Christian story unearths the primal nature lying just under the surface of our lives. The whole world is swinging with pregnant fullness: heaven, earth, fire water. The fire of Peter's betrayal out in the courtyard becomes the fire of the Risen One cooking fish on the shores of Galilee's sea. The waters of the Red Sea passage become the waters of baptism through which we cross into a new future with the living God. The empty tomb becomes a full womb heavy with all of us who emerge fresh and new, resurrection children every one.

At the birth of her daughter during the invasion of Kuwait in 1991, the poet Tracey Johnstone describes a change in her whole outlook. She writes, "I had a long, challenging birth—unmedicated, hallucinatory, *poetic*. My room filled with every woman who has ever given birth or will give birth, witness to the last brutal and ecstatic efforts of my greatest poem—my daughter. My poetry changed. I delved even deeper into poets unaffected by the academic postmodern disdain of the "Grand Words"—Love, Hope, Joy, Peace, God, Beauty; words I was being warned off of in writing class because academia had decided they were tired, clichéd. Giving birth, becoming a mother with war in the background, made with these words and the ideas behind them fierce, powerful, fresh. Real." Shortly after this, she felt her life's calling emerge as she began a midwifery apprenticeship to help people understand, in her words, "that *we* are a creative process, the primary expression of a creative force." That's Easter—and she may not even know it.

The Apostle Paul has his own distinct language for this birthing process, but the similarities are striking: "If anyone is in Christ, she is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see everything has become new! All this is from God..."

Tonight with fire and water, with Scripture and Spirit we are all born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The "Grand Words" of Birth and Calling are yours for the keeping--precious gifts of Holy Baptism. You are made a new creation. God takes your whole self into the baptismal waters and raises it all into life-giving service to others. Not simply your confident smile but your hot tears; not just your good intentions but your unresolved anger; not simply your ability to love but your lingering prejudice; not just your brain and heart, but your vegetable body.

The mystery of Easter is not only that Jesus rises from death to new life, but that God wants your whole self, God can and will use all of you. We only want to offer the parts we approve of, but God wants it all. Don't have to pass an exam, don't have to make the grade; don't have to make a first impression, don't have to impress the boss. Listen, I will tell you a mystery: the tomb is empty because God can take it all. God can make it new. Right where you are—right who you already are—right now.

The charge (please stand): Tonight you remove your helmet of opinions and you renounce the spirit of slavery that wants you to fall back into fear. You put on the clothing of a child of God that you are. By the power of the risen Christ receive a new trust in the God who makes all things possible; receive a new sight to see as Jesus sees; receive a new power—not power the way the world defines it but the way God defines it: power to love and forgive and bless and heal as Jesus does.

All you need bring is willingness for the journey.

Christ is risen. You are a new creation! Happy Easter.