

## Easter Vigil, 2010

I have two pieces of very good news for you this evening. The first is that the power of God which was demonstrated in raising Jesus from the dead promises to us that when these bodies of our eventually give out, on the last day the power of God will also raise us up with glorified bodies that are prepared for eternity – “Alleluia, Christ is Risen!”

The second piece of good news is that if you think this service is running long, at least you can be thankful that we only used four of the OT lessons assigned for this service rather than the NINE that are listed, not to mention the epistle and gospel.

Why so many readings? Well, the historical answer is that the 4<sup>th</sup> century service on which this one is based was an all night vigil, with the Easter acclamation, Gloria, baptisms and communion coming at dawn on Easter day (nine hours from now!). So recounting all the great stories of the OT, which is what all those readings are, took up all the hours of darkness as they awaited the dawn of Easter morning.

A very moving service, rich in symbolism and meaning, but you try sitting the family down around a table Easter afternoon to dig into a nice ham when no one slept the night before!

So we shorten the readings and simulate the dawn with lighting. That’s the historical answer, but there’s a more profound reason for having all those readings on this, the most holy night of the Christian year. The reason is that we need the whole story for the whole person. We need the entire gospel for the entire world.

Yes, we need to know that we are created in God’s image and are his beloved children. But we also need to know that, we, his beloved children, in pursuit of our own autonomy and aggrandizement, reject that love and prefer to do things our own way. That, Genesis tells us, is why God sent that flood (the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading for the Vigil), because things had gotten so bad among his children that he decided to start over with Noah.

And that’s pretty much the pattern of the OT. God creates, people rebel, God starts over with someone new.

Next in the Vigil readings comes Abraham who, with Sarah, were the father and mother of faith. Followed by the deliverance of the Israelites at the Red Sea. When the Israelites failed, God sent the prophets to call them back. This pattern went on and on until, as St. Paul wrote, in the fullness of time God sent his son. God took the initiative and even then we killed his Son, and for those dark days it appeared that that was that.

But then came Easter morning. Then came the empty tomb. Then came the realization that there is no power greater than God’s power to create, to forgive and to start over. The message of the resurrection is that God will not give up on us and God will not be defeated.

But all this assumes that we know the story; the whole story, because in Christ God has reconciled a whole person; good in our creation, conflicted and broken in our sinfulness, eternally thankful for forgiveness and joyous in the light of resurrection power.

Because the stories lead us to the God behind them. God our father, our judge, our savior and our source of eternal life.

Now don't worry, we cut the readings by more than half and we'll get everyone home at a reasonable hour. But please remember that it is important to know the whole story and to see how it shapes and transforms the story of your entire life. Amen.