

April 3, 2010

Bearers of The Light

Rev. Julia A. Fritts

Great Vigil of Easter

Let us pray: Holy and Gracious God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: receive through your generous love our heartfelt offerings this night, in your name. Amen.

What an awesome night this is! The most powerful, most mysterious and most beautiful liturgy, expressing our own walk through darkness, into light. We've walked together as a congregation through the long darkness of Lent, with its labyrinth of trials: earthquakes and blizzards, hurricanes, and floods; illness, death, devastation, and loss. We've walked the long road of our whole lives from the darkness into the glimmer and the light of knowing Christ. We've walked as a people, as humankindred, through our whole history of darkness: through our collective wilderness, through our own dark valley of dry bones. Our liturgy walks us all the way through Our Story, until the moment when Jesus of Nazareth, the son of God - crucified to death on a cross, wrapped in a shroud, sealed in a tomb - rose from the dead as Jesus the Christ. And the whole of history was changed forever.

Our liturgy walks us forward to this moment when, in the darkness, our Paschal candle is lit and we sing, "The Light of Christ, thanks be to God!" – reliving that moment in the cold darkness of the tomb when Christ's heart sparked to life and flamed again. From his great Light to our little lights, the brightness spreads; our hearts awaken to hope and new life. New creation! New baptism! We light the candles of our newly baptized Christians from this Paschal candle, with the call to "*receive the Light of Christ, and bear it out into the world in witness to his love.*"

Like the spreading of the light that we've just experienced, from the Paschal Candle to every individual little candle until the whole sanctuary was filled with light, we stand together as Christ's Light in the World. It's really a brilliant design, I think – each person brightening the circle of people they walk through daily life with, each church brightening the town they live in – the light spreading quickly and far. What a brilliant design!

Every once in a while I get a little glimpse, like this one, of the awesome brilliance of God's design. Yesterday, during our Good Friday services, I was moved beyond words to witness God's children

in prayer and in chant, offering their love. Each single soul, a light in the world. Each one with a personal relationship with Christ. Every single person bearing the commandment, and given the power beyond their knowing, to spread the light of Christ in their own unique way. Each single one of us can step up in our level of awareness to the truth we are the Bearers of his Light now. All of creation, every heart beating on this planet tonight, is a bearer of the light of Jesus Christ, whether they are blessed enough to know it or not. Every soul is beloved of God; each one precious. It is beyond our understanding, and almost impossible to take in, that Jesus willingly gave himself up for us; for the sins of the whole world; that all of creation would be encompassed within the reach of his awesome cross.

There is a powerful crucifix on the grounds of a lovely convent nearby: St. Birgitta's, in Darien, where anyone can go to just walk the grounds, and take in the peace and set-apartness of the place. There on a little hill is a stone altar, with a life-sized cross with our Lord's image carved on it. It is the sort of sight that brings you to your knees, and I gazed at it for a long time. And I saw the most arresting thing. There on the cross, hanging by those awful nails in the midst of his agony, our Lord's right hand was, even then, held in the sign of blessing, reaching out to the whole world.

When we think of him in his suffering, don't our hearts just break to think of him alone? Like you, I want to be one of the women who were brave enough to stay with him. Like you, I want to think that those throngs of impassioned followers who shouted, "*Hosanna in the Highest! Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord,*" the ones who threw down their cloaks and palms at his feet just days before – I want to think that they would be bold enough to declare their love for him on *that* dreadful day, not run away in his time of devastation. I can hardly bear to think that what he did for the world - that his hand of blessing over all of creation from that cross - could possibly go forgotten. That people might continue to go through their entire lives not knowing the relief and strengthening of his real presence, and discover the truth of his radical welcome only after this lifetime is past.

We know, in the world that we live in, that the majority of people we encounter day to day do not have the experience of knowing Jesus the Christ. Many of us here tonight *are* among the lucky generations of people who grew up in the church, and have, over time, come to our own understanding of the reality of God. We are blessed to have been introduced to the possibility of being in relationship, living in relationship, with Jesus Christ, since the time when we were children.

Many others of us here tonight have come to a relationship with Christ later in life, and wish they could have known his comforting presence earlier. But life on earth has changed vastly over the past many decades, and we are most definitely in a post-Christendom world, where the pressure and momentum of all things “successful” have overtaken the landscape of life. And so the majority of people we meet have grown up in a world that did not include time set apart for God.

Oftentimes my heart is heavy to think that churches are emptier than ever, that the little pools of light in churches celebrating Easter Eve with us tonight are shrinking, and blinking out. But then I think of the incredible faithfulness of even the littlest churches, the deep and personal connection visible in the parishioners here in this church, at the foot of the cross yesterday, and my heart lifts. I’m reminded of my Chinese take-out fortune cookie message that I keep on my desk that reminds me every day that *“All the darkness in the world cannot put out the light of one single candle.”*

Each little one of us is all Jesus has to bear his light into the world, and Jesus says that this is enough. Each little one of us is impossibly worthy of his suffering on the cross, only because Jesus declared it so. Each little one of us, in our own authentic way, can *love him back*. Each little one of us can make sure on Good Friday that he is never alone on that cross. Each little one of us can follow his final commandment, that *we love one another as he loved us*. And each little one of us can be the bearer of His Light into the world, widening the little pools of candlelight: from heart to heart, from church to church, from town and city and country and continent, until our whole little Planet Earth shines out in love returned, singing, “Alleluia! Christ is Risen! The Lord of all Creation is Risen Indeed – Alleluia!”

Amen.

The Rev. Julia A. Fritts

St. John’s Episcopal Church, Stamford, CT

