

Epworth Chapel on the Green
April 4, 2015
Easter Vigil
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Genesis 1:1-2:2
Exodus 14:10-15:1
Isaiah 55:1-11
Ezekiel 37:1-14
Zephaniah 3:14-20
Romans 6:1-11
Matthew 28:1-10

For the third night in a row we gather this evening to ask the question: *Why are we here?*

We begin by answering that we are here because we are part of a tradition. A tradition that claims that these three days are the most pivotal in all of human history.

But we are also here for a specific reason on this Holy Saturday. We are here because we are part of a tradition that makes a bold and audacious claim. We are part of a tradition that says: ***When things seem utterly and completely hopeless, God shows up!*** We are here tonight because there were some women who claimed “we have seen the Lord” when things seemed utterly hopeless.

We are here tonight because of a tradition that tells us that when God’s people were being chased through the Egyptian wilderness, God showed up and the sea swallowed up their pursuers.

We are here tonight because the tradition tells us that when three Hebrew men were thrown into a fiery furnace and all looked lost, a fourth presence began to walk with them in the flames.

We are here tonight because the tradition tells us of a vision of a valley floor littered with old bones that began to rattle and come to life again.

We are here tonight because of the tradition that tells us of two grieving sisters who, when all seemed lost, saw their brother walk out of his four day old grave clothes.

We are here tonight because of a tradition that tells us of a widow woman who was down to her last bit of flour and oil, but who gave what she had to serve the Lord and His prophet. And the oil and flour did not run out.

We are here tonight because we are part of a tradition that tells us that God's people may experience times when they are battered and knocked down, but they are never knocked out.

The writer of the Book of Hebrews says it this way:

And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength, and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted,

and mistreated – the world was not worthy of them. These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.
(Hebrews 11:32-40)

We are here tonight because we are part of a tradition. *And the story can only be told when we join our lives and voices with those who have gone before us.*

And at the heart of that story is the unwavering faith and conviction that **when things seem utterly lost and hopeless, God shows up in great power.** We are here tonight because of some women who, in the darkest hour, claimed, “We have seen the Lord!”

So tonight we gather here and we make noise. We celebrate. We lift our hands and our voices and our hearts toward heaven because those women saw the Lord. And we make noise and we celebrate and we rejoice because in some small way, *we have seen him too!*

So rejoice. Give thanks. And take your place alongside all of the others in this great story who’ve learned through experience that when things seem utterly hopeless, God is just beginning to do His work.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.