

Epworth Chapel on the Green  
March 26, 2016  
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

I recently discovered an ancient homily given on this day many centuries ago. I'm still tracking down the preacher, but in the meantime I share it with you all tonight:

Something strange is happening – there is a great silence on earth today, and great silence and stillness. The whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep.

The earth trembled and is still, because God has fallen asleep in the flesh, and he has raised up all who have slept ever since the world began. God has died in the flesh, and hell trembles with fear.

God has gone to search for our first parent, as for a lost sheep. Greatly desiring to visit those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, he has gone to free from sorrow the captives of Adam and Eve, he who is both God and the son of Eve.

*The Lord approached them bearing the cross, the weapon that had won him the victory.*

At the sight of him, Adam, the first man he had created, struck his breast in terror and cried out to everyone: “My Lord be with you all.”

Christ answered: “And with your spirit.”

The Lord took Adam by the hand and raised him up, saying: “Awake, O sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.” I am your God, who for your sake have become your son.

Out of love for you and for your descendants I, now by my own authority, command all who are held in bondage to come forth, all who are in darkness to be enlightened, all who are sleeping to arise. I ORDER you, O sleeper, to awake.

I did not create you to be a prisoner in hell.

Rise from the dead, for I am the life of the dead. Rise up, work of my hands, you who were created in my image. Rise, let us leave this place, for you are in me and I am in you. Together we form only one person and we cannot be separated.

For your sake I, your God, became your son; I, the Lord, took the form of a slave. I, whose home is above the heavens, descended to the earth and beneath the earth. For your sake, for the sake of man, I became like a man without help, free among the dead.

For the sake of you who left a garden, I was betrayed to my enemies in a garden, and I was crucified. See on my face the spittle I received, in order to restore to you the life I once breathed into you.

See there, the marks of the blows I received in order to refashion your warped nature, in MY image. On my back, see the marks of the scourging I endured to remove the burden of sin that weighs upon your back.

See my hands, nailed firmly to a tree, for you who once wickedly stretched out your hand, to a tree.

I slept on the cross, and a sword pierced my side, for you who slept in paradise and brought forth Eve, from your side. My side has healed the pain in yours. My sleep will rouse you from your sleep in hell. *The sword that pierced me has sheathed the sword that was turned against you.*

Rise, let us leave this place. The enemy led you out of the earthly paradise. I will not restore you to *that* paradise. But, I will enthrone you in heaven.

I forbade you the tree that was only a symbol of life. But see, I, who am life itself am now one with you. I appointed cherubim to guard you, as slaves are guarded. But now I make them worship you as God. The throne formed by cherubim awaits you, its bearers swift and eager.

The bridal chamber is adorned, the banquet is ready. The eternal dwelling places are prepared, the treasure houses of all good things *lie open*. The kingdom of heaven has been prepared for you from all eternity.

Thanks be to God.

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