

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia!

We have been on a journey this night. The scripture, prophecies, psalms, canticles, hymns and stories have brought us through the long journey, the history of God's intervention in the lives of people. And the message that came through loud and clear in all this history is self-evident. **Even through the darkness of death we have not been abandoned; we have not been left orphaned.** We have been loved with a steadfast love.

We started with the story of Creation, the clarion call that it is God who created heaven and earth and all that is within it and yes, even us, God's children.

We have come through the waters of the Red Sea dry and safe. We have not drowned in the throbbing blood of our own fear.

We have listened to the words of Ezekiel and the psalmists reassuring themselves and us over and over again that the love of God is steadfast.

What a wonderful word that is: **steadfast**. In a world where everything is transitory, where we lose youth and looks and energy, where children grow up too fast, where jobs are suddenly taken from us, where even the amazing technology around us is constantly changing, leaving us breathless, we are assured of one unchanging reality: God's love is **steadfast**.

It is this same love that brings us through the terrible days and nights that are captured in the words of the creed: ***"He was crucified, dead, and buried."***

All of us have felt fear. There is *enormous* fear in these stories. It is the release from fear that causes the psalmist to sing for joy; to dance and sing to the Lord a new song, for the Lord has delivered us.

Throughout history, over and over again, God's children forget their God and become terribly afraid. And then God has compassion upon them because of this steadfast love and comes and releases them from fear.

So here, in the dawning light of Easter, after the terrible hours we have spent at the foot of the cross, after the burial and the loneliness of the death of the Beloved, come the women, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, the writer of Matthew tells us, and they are afraid. They are afraid because they think they have been abandoned by him who had given them hope and life. His death feels like abandonment to them. But they are

women, and even in death, they do the loving thing. They go to see the tomb and do what women of that time, that place, that culture do: wash the body and anoint it with oil.

But there, at the mouth of the cave, they are met by a wondrous sight. It is a fearful sight because they are confronted by the unknown: the familiar body is gone. In its place there is a being so infused with light that every time it is encountered by a human being, throughout the stories of Scripture, that person is filled with awe. Appearance “like lightning” is pretty hard for human eyes to take in without trembling.

But notice what happens. It depends on who possesses the eyes of faith and who possesses the eyes of unbelief.

Both the women and the guards of the tomb see this being. The guards “shook and became like dead men.” But the angel said to the *women*, not to the guards, but the *women* who loved him whom they were seeking; “Do not be afraid.”

“Do not be afraid.” were the first words said.

The women listened to the wondrous words of promise fulfilled and ran to tell the others. Even so, we are told they ran “with fear and great joy.” That’s the important part. There is always a little fear in our great joy. We are so used to losing joy. We want to hold on to it, so we are always a bit afraid that it will not last.

But because of that great joy, because of the love that had brought them there, because they believed and ran to tell the others, Jesus appears to them suddenly and makes it clear that their joy would last, that they no longer needed to be afraid.

The holy presence becomes tangible to them, they bow down and take hold of his feet and worship him. And that makes them strong enough to continue – to go tell the others, “We have seen the Lord!”

What comforting words! What energizing words! “We have seen the Lord!” Remember what we said at the beginning? The message that comes through to us in all the readings of this Easter Vigil is this: **We have not been abandoned. We are loved with a steadfast love.**

The crowning of this reality came with the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. And the joy that never leaves, regardless of how much goes wrong in the world, comes from the assurance that he has been raised from the dead. This is the meaning of this night.

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