

## EASTER B • 2009

### Christ the King

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Jesus Christ is risen! Alleluia! The long journey of Lent has ended. Death's silence on Good Friday is over. Our Lord Jesus Christ is risen from death's cold embrace. He has risen from the tomb! Transforming life into the glory that is nothing less than holy love, life eternal. And now because Christ lives, we shall live both now and always.

There is, however, a small detail in the Easter story that only John seems to remember. The other gospel writers – Matthew, Mark, and Luke – all report that the women who came to the tomb that first Easter arrived as the sun was piercing the sky. Matthew writes, “as the first day of the week was dawning.” Mark notes, “very early on the first day of the week, as the sun was rising.” Luke echoes this same line: “on the first day of the week, at early dawn.” It's a small detail, but the first three gospels agree: the women discovered the empty tomb in the light of Easter's dawn.

Only John is different. “Early on the first day of the week, **while it was still dark**, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed.” Did you hear it? “While it was still dark.” That small, fascinating detail from John has my imagination this Easter [night] day. Why the difference? What is John telling us in this “still dark” line?

To answer that question, we must remember that night and darkness color the canvas of John's Gospel. In his third chapter, Nicodemus comes to visit our Lord “at night.” And then, in the darkest of nights, Judas leaves the upper room to betray Jesus. At that moment, John simply reported, “And it was night.” John is telling us that the dark of night speaks of our confusing, broken, and lost human condition.

“While it was still dark. . . .” With the landscape so opaque we can hardly find our way, John reports something profound; a truth about ourselves and God's work that only Easter can address. What if this little dark detail is reminding us of the place where all of us begin the Easter celebration? What if each one of us is Mary Magdalene, groping our way toward the reality that Christ indeed lives, toward the reality that death is vanquished, toward the reality that life and love are triumphant? What if that is exactly what we should want to hear this evening [morning]?

We began this liturgy in the dark. In fact this liturgy must begin in the dark. With trembling lips and a pounding heart, that is where we begin this day of days. In fact, we cannot fully celebrate the resurrection of our Lord if we do not begin “while it is still dark.” Why? Because that is precisely where God begins the story. The scriptures speak with one voice from Genesis to Revelation that God’s gift of life and love come to the human family lost in a darkened night of our own making. From Adam and Eve’s willful choice to David’s shameful adultery to the disciples’ thoughtless selfishness, we find ourselves on a darkened stage hungry for light.

This was the message of Lent these last 40 days. We took the Lenten journey feeling our way through the darkness. We have journeyed through the shadows to this Easter [night] morning. Just as we plant a seed in the dark, moist womb of the earth in the hope of seeing a plant pierce the ground’s crust, so our lives must go to the place where we admit that darkness and death are our lot until Easter’s light peaks over the horizon with resurrection light.

So what do we do with this information? Let me quickly, simply suggest a few things. For one, **refuse to ignore the reality of just *how* dark the DARK really is.** The darkness through which the women walked on that Easter day is still with us. It did not begin on Good Friday. This darkness is so very dark that human hands pierced the flesh of our Lord with nails. Human pride pushed Jesus out of the city. Human evil hung Jesus on the cross. And yes, all of us were there that dark day when thick darkness covered the earth as God shed tears of sorrow.

**Remember, too, that darkness is the absence of light.** Put yourself in a darkened room and light one candle. Immediately, that tiny light dispels all the darkness. [Remember how the light of Christ spread throughout this church.] So it is for us who long for the light that is Easter. One of the most important realities of Easter is that God breaks into the darkness of our lives with uncommon, life-giving grace. Welcome and embrace our Lord’s gift of new life and walk from the darkness toward the light.

And then there is this Easter gift: **Decide today to be a person of Easter light.** Today [Tonight] we bask in the warm glow of the Paschal light. Today [Tonight], we gladly, joyfully sing our Alleluia's praise. Tonight, we welcome through the waters of Baptism, anointing with Chrism and the Eucharist: Adam Day, Jessica Hughes, Aida Hutz and Jeffery Maynard. Tonight we receive into the Catholic Church, with Confirmation and Eucharist: Rory Hanson, Matthew Morrissey, Korey Rugg and Sonja Schapp.

Tonight Conor Burns, Morgan Johnson and Virginia Tobiason complete the sacraments of initiation through Confirmation.

And tonight, we each renew our own commitment to believe, to belong and to serve. Alleluia! Jesus Christ is Risen!

Today, [tonight] smiles break on our faces in joyous celebration of our Lord's victory over death. May we say "Yes" to Jesus Christ, the light of the world. May we say "Yes" and walk with Mary Magdela toward the morning light, toward Easter's breaking dawn. Alleluia! Jesus Christ is Risen.

*Adapted from GraceWorks: From Darkness to Dawn, 2009.*

But about tomorrow?

We will decide today whether or not we will walk into God's good future tomorrow and the following day and every day thereafter as men and women of light. We will decide whether or not we spend our time trudging through the darkness of sin and defeat. Or we will decide to be like Mary Magdalene, moving toward the morning light, becoming a person made new by God's Easter gift.

So what will it be for us? I invite us to dare become the persons Christ so longs for us to be. Throw off the darkness that keeps us from this dawn's breaking light. Let's say "Yes" to Jesus Christ, the light of the world. Say "Yes" and make our way to Easter's breaking dawn. Alleluia! Jesus Christ is risen!