

**Easter Vigil
Matthew 28:1-10
April 11, 2009**

What a night.

A night of flame and light, bursting forth to banish the darkness.

A night of stories ... tales of creation, liberation, and restoration.

A night of initiation, as this child, James Malcolm Riddell, is washed into Christ's death and resurrection.

**A night of proclamation, as we sound the ancient cry of hope and faith:
"Alleluia, Christ is risen!"**

Christ is risen, we proclaim, and Matthew's gospel gives us a resurrection scene worth of the best CGI special effects that Hollywood could throw at it. An earthquake, a giant boulder rolled away, a fiery angel, lighting, thunder, and the incredible statement, "he is not here. He has been raised, as he told you." And then the women, the faithful women, who only came to embalm the dead body of their friend Jesus of Nazareth, miraculously find themselves touching the warm, living feet of Jesus the Christ, risen and restored, going on ahead of them to Galilee.

It is magnificent, terrifying, but oh, so obvious and clear. How could there be any doubt, after all that noise, all that action, all that drama, that Christ is risen?

And yet, just a few weeks later, the gospel of Matthew tells us, on that mountain in Galilee, as the resurrected Christ gives his followers the Great Commission, to go into all the nations of the world, making disciples of all people, even then, Matthew tells us "many believed, but some doubted."

If only resurrection were as clear and as obvious and as unavoidable as it was that morning in the garden. If only we could see Christ's resurrection as unambiguously as those women did.

But 2,000 years later, any of us might be excused for wondering ... so what was the point? Christ is raised, but wars still rage, children still starve, loved ones still die, and last week's earthquake didn't roll stones away from graves, it buried people under shattered buildings.

Christ is raised, but the world spins on, day after day in its implacable way. And we may ask ...What was the point of that Sunday morning encounter, long, long ago? What is the point of proclaiming Christ is risen? What does resurrection mean, anyway, to us, tonight?

I think it means this: God is a gambler.

God is taking a tremendous risk, saving the world this way, in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

But this is how it had to be. Because God didn't mastermind or control or dictate to the world. God left it free. Free to choose or not to choose to love God. Free to choose or not to choose to love neighbor. Free to evolve and unfold in unpredictable, and often deadly ways. But free.

And the only way God could see to save this free creation was to jump into it, swim along in it, transform it from the inside out, living it and loving it and ultimately dying for it, alone on a cross on a hill outside Jerusalem. That's God's gamble. That by becoming fully incarnated in this one man, this one life and this one death would make all the difference.

God is a gambler.

But resurrection – resurrection stacks the deck.

By raising Jesus from the dead, God didn't play fair. God vindicated this risk, this man, this life, this death.

By raising Jesus from the dead, God said yes. Yes to risk. Yes to love. Yes to peace. Yes to life.

By raising Jesus from the dead, God shows us that it doesn't matter if the world doesn't get it, doesn't love, doesn't give back, doesn't say 'thank you.' That it doesn't matter if the world actively tries to shut down and smother God's gift of love and relationship and peace embodied in Jesus of Nazareth.

By raising Jesus from the dead, God says that's not the final answer.

By raising Jesus from the dead, God reminds us that in this game of chance, *God* is the house, and the house always wins.

So what are we to make of this story, this resurrection, tonight? What are we to make of God's risky gamble, God's shady resurrection dealings with creation?

Simply this: we are called to become gamblers too. To risk, all of it, everything, trusting in the power of the resurrection, trusting that in this chancy world we live in, that God is the house, and the house always wins.

Let me tell you what God's gamble looks like, when it emerges in real life, on the ground. It looks like 62 people, 11 of them representing this parish, traveling to Haiti for a week. It looks like Colleen Hegg and her mom, Marlene Cosgrove, and Gina Mazzolini and Wendy Hedeem and Carol Mader, a local priest, digging trash out of a garden for three days, retilling it, reshaping it, and replanting it, for the orphans at the St. Blaise orphanage. And then having to leave it there, not knowing for sure if anyone will keep that garden going, if anyone will remember and honor the hard work of these women.

It looks like Dick Johnson, gently pressing the abdomens of ancient Haitian women, listening to their hearts, peering into their eyes, and knowing that so little, really, can be done for any of these people. Or Monica Stafford, pulling tooth after bloody tooth in the dental clinic, stopping decay and disease the old-fashioned way. And then flying home to the States not knowing, for sure, if those people they touched will live or die, dwindle or thrive.

It looks like Pam Miklavcic, stomping around the back fields of the Central Plateau, dreaming of fish ponds that could feed a hungry village, but not knowing, for sure, if the ponds will ever be dug, or once dug, if they can be maintained.

It looks like my son Andrew and his friend Eddie Aparicio, painting a giant mural in the orphanage dining room, and then gently pressing the paint-covered hand of each child into an arch of interconnectedness and hope. And then having to leave, not knowing if that touch, that connection, will be remembered years from now, as the mural fades and the children grow.

And it also looks like tonight, like this holy and miraculous night, as David and Eileen Riddell bring James to this font, and adopt him into our family of faith, just as they adopted him into their own family. As they show by this action that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has made all the difference in their own lives, and they trust, they're betting it all – every bit of evidence in the world out there to the contrary -- that it will make a difference in James's life, too.

It looks like the words of a prayer that hung on the wall of Mother Teresa's House for Children in Calcutta. Words originally written by a man named Kent Keith, but fashioned into a prayer that goes like this:

People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered. Forgive them anyway.

If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Be kind anyway.

If you are successful, you will win some unfaithful friends and some genuine enemies. Succeed anyway.

If you are honest and sincere, people may deceive you. Be honest and sincere anyway.

What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight. Create anyway.

If you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous. Be happy anyway.

The good you do today, will often be forgotten. Do good anyway.

Give the best you have, and it will never be enough. Give your best anyway.

It's a risky business, living the resurrected life. We live it in spite of the harsh reality of the world. We live it in defiance of cruelty and hatred and simple indifference. We live it anyway, trusting that a larger truth is at hand, that a more real reality is at work.

And so this is the point, the miraculous point of resurrection. Christ is raised, but raised so that we can join him in this risky, chancy, dangerous business of redeeming the world.

Christ is raised, but raised so that we can take our own chances, trusting that God is able to bring meaning out of meaninglessness, hope out of hopelessness, light out of darkness and life out of death.

And so we take a chance, but a chance taken with confidence and hope, when we proclaim ...

Alleluia! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!