

**Thankful Memorial Episcopal Church**  
**The Great Vigil of Easter, April 16, 2022**

**The Rev. Rachel Eskite**

When my friend Nancy was ordained, the preacher at the service told a story about her granddaughter. You see, her granddaughter wanted a bedtime story and not knowing what to do, the woman asked her granddaughter what Biblical story she'd like to hear, and without a beat, the little girl answered: "tell me the story about the women who spiced up Jesus!"

The women who came from Galilee to the tomb to tend to the body of Jesus had prepared spices to wash and anoint Jesus' body. This was part of the burial customs at the time—to wash and prepare the body, anointing it with oil and spices. A way to say goodbye. There is something real, tangible, and visceral about laying hands on the body of a loved one that helps us to say goodbye.

One of the many things my mom says when she looks back on the night my dad died is that she wishes she had washed his body. The act of washing, of tending to the body of a deceased loved one is an act of love, an act of care, one that can help us say goodbye, as our beloved leaves the mortal part of their journey.

The women—Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them—went to the tomb as was their custom, but when they got there, they were surprised to find the stone rolled away from the tomb and the body of Jesus not there, but missing.

And, then, they saw two men in dazzling clothes standing beside them, and filled with fear they bowed their heads, and the dazzling creatures said to them:

*"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again."*

Alleluia, the Lord is risen!

The women, then, filled with joy and spectacular awe, returned to Galilee and told the others what they had seen, what they had experienced.

The Lord is Risen! They told the others.

But the others did not believe them: to them it seemed as if these silly women were spinning a tall tale, when in reality, these women—the women present at the tomb—were the first witnesses of the resurrection, the first to proclaim that the Lord is Risen, the first to be bearers of the Good and Excellent News of God in Christ.

The women who went to spice up Jesus, instead found their lives spiced up by Jesus! Spiced up by the resurrection of their Lord and Savior. Spiced up by the Good News that exploded from their hearts and poured forth from their mouths.

The women—these women—were the first witnesses to the resurrection and did not hesitate to tell others about it.

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We who are gathered here this evening have spent time in the tomb with Jesus. We have spent time waiting in the darkness, held in suspension, in the time between Jesus' death on a cross and his resurrection.

We have quite literally sat in the dark. We have sat and we have listened. Listened to the story of the people of God. Listened to how God has been—and always will be—at work in the world.

*For with you is the well of life  
and in your light we see light.*

We hear the story of creation—where we begin in the darkness—this time in a womb instead of a tomb—and we see God bring all that is into being and proclaim it as good.

We then see Abraham struggle with obedience and the binding and near sacrifice of Isaac—a story that causes many of us to question who exactly is this God? And then Isaac is not sacrificed, and instead the voice of the Lord cries out to Abraham, and Abraham listens. A voice crying out, calling us by name.

*I will bless the Lord who gives me counsel  
my heart teaches me night after night.*

Our hearts teach us, especially on this night. Especially on this night where we travel from womb to tomb to resurrection.

And then we hear the story of Israel's deliverance from Egypt—the journey out of bondage through the Red Sea to freedom as the people of God. A strangely tumultuous journey that elicits song and praise and thanksgiving:

*The Lord is my strength and my refuge  
the Lord has become my Savior  
This is my God and I will praise him  
the God of my people and I will exalt him.*

And then we learn more about what it means for God to be our Lord and Savior in the Valley of Dry Bones, where we see the power of God to grant us new life. In all these stories from all who have gone before us, we stop in the darkness and remember God.

We remember the works of our God, the God who brought God's people out of the darkness into the light, out of bondage into freedom, out of death into life.

*I remember the time past  
I muse upon all your deeds  
I consider the works of your hands  
I spread out my hands to you  
my soul gasps to you like a thirsty land.*

We have been fed this night, the story of our God has been poured out like a fountain and we drink deeply from its well.

We are being prepared for what is to come, prepared to see the resurrection and to proclaim its glory. We are being prepared like the women who prepared the spices for Jesus' body and then are spiced up by Jesus.

We, too, are spiced up by Jesus, we, too, have been prepared by our time in the tomb with him. This is why we do not rush to Easter—in order to remember---remember fully who we are as people of God—we must travel as God did through history, in the flesh, and experience it all.

On this night, we remember who we are. We remember that we are the people of God. We remember that we have been made new. We have been baptized into Christ's death—and we experienced firsthand what kind of death he died—and then we remember what it is like to wait and behold the glory of the Lord as such love comes out of darkness into light.

And then we remember that He Is Risen.

That is the thesis statement of our faith: he is risen.

So, instead of pushing the women's proclamation aside, let us rush back from the tomb, and proclaim with our hearts, with our lips, and with our deeds, that the Lord is Risen!

let us proclaim that we belong to the God who made us, redeems us, restores and strengthens us.