“Thou art the man”

Holy Week and Easter at Christ Church

2022

Fr. David Curry

Ecce Homo, Caravaggio, c. 1605

"Truly this was the Son of God"

"The dogma is the drama," the novelist and theologian Dorothy L. Sayers once wisely noted.[1] Nowhere is that idea more concentrated than in the liturgy of Palm Sunday. It begins the one long liturgy of Holy Week which culminates in Easter. It is the drama of salvation but only if we learn what the liturgy of Palm Sunday and Holy Week teaches us in and through its intensity.

We are not the victims in this story apart from the being the victims of ourselves in our judgements and vilification of others. In a strange way, there is a kind of reversal of the "scapegoat mechanism".[2] For the scapegoat of all our discontents, our hatred, and our fear of others is transformed, first, by Isaiah in the Servant Songs, and, then, in the Gospels into the Lamb of God. "Behold, the Lamb of God," John the Baptist proclaims in the Gospels read at the end of the Trinity Season and in Advent, and so in the intensity of the Passion in the Good Friday sentences (BCP, p.173). But in him we confront ourselves not as victims but as persecutors. Palm Sunday and Holy Week confront us with ourselves in the disarray, the chaos and the evil of human sin which wreaks such havoc in our world and day.

As the sociologist, philosopher and literary critic, René Girard, observes, major social and political crises, such as the Black Death in the 14th century (not unlike the Covid-19 pandemic), result in the dissolution of all cultural distinctions, the things which belong to our individuality *within* a community of order. The resulting confusion and fear leads to fixing blame for this confusion and break-down of order and life; hence, the scapegoat figure, someone or some group who stands out as different in some way or another becomes the target of our discontent, our fear, and our hatred. Thus in mythology and history, scapegoat stories are really persecution narratives.

This is inverted in the biblical understanding, especially in the Gospels. We confront *ourselves* as the persecutors in a radical internalizing of sin. The spectacle of Holy Week which begins with the drama of Palm Sunday is the spectacle of our humanity in all of the forms of its disarray, on the one hand, and the figure of Christ, on the other hand, in whose presence we are revealed to ourselves. Paradoxically, in the sense of a profound yet dialectical truth, that is the mercy, the good, if you will, of the Passion.

We go from the highs of shouting joyous "Hosannas" to the lows of the vindictive and mean cries of "crucify, crucify," and then to the greater joys, but only through the deeper sorrows, of the "Alleluias" of the Resurrection. "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us," is the underlying theme; our passover from death to life in him. We confront our evil in all of its many forms in the light of the greater good of God's love in Christ. He is "the Lamb of God that takest away the sin of the world." We behold ourselves in him, to know even as we are known.

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[1] Dorothy L. Sayers, The Greatest Drama Ever Staged is the Official Creed of Christendom, London Sunday Times, 1938.

[2] René Girard, Scapegoat, John Hopkins University Press, 1986, p. 101.

The challenge of Holy Week is for us to be immersed in his Passion. Nowhere is that more fully and completely presented than in our liturgy which beginning today sets before us all four Gospel accounts of the Passion of Christ. It is really quite powerful to read and to hear the Passion in the four voices of the Evangelists. Each account has its own voice, its own point of interest, its own perspective about us and about Christ. But all four together have a unity which is found in the teaching which they set before us, a unity found in and through the differences of emphasis. What is our task? To find ourselves in the crowd of the Passion, in the mob, in the madness of crowds, out of whose violence comes the greater good of Christ's victory through his sacrifice and Passion. It begins today with Matthew's account of the Passion; it continues with Mark on Monday and Tuesday in his account of the Passion; with Luke on Wednesday and Thursday as we enter into the *Triduum Sacrum* of Holy Week; it ends with John's Passion on Good Friday. *Ecce homo.* "Behold the man," as Pilate will ironically say.

Can we hear this? It is so profoundly counter-culture both with respect to the ancient world and certainly our modern world, so certain in its accusations and judgments of others; always of others and never ourselves. The mercy is in confronting ourselves. It is the counter to our over investment in ourselves. Here the deep love of Christ seeks to bring us out of the prisons of our ego and into the joy of our life in God.

How can we see and hear this in our post-Christian culture? Let me suggest a way offered to us from the Scriptures themselves. It is the story of David, at once a hero whose heart is full of courage and full of a deep commitment to God. "Man looks on the outward appearance," it is famously said, "but God looks on the heart." We are meant to see the heart of David which God sees. But the story of David includes the sins of David, a most compelling depiction of the slippery slope of sin, about how sin begets sin begets sin, going from the lust of the eyes to the lust of the heart, to adultery, to the attempts at covering it up through cunning and deceit, and to a conspiracy to commit murder. "It happened late one afternoon," it begins, and ends with an amazing understatement. "But the thing which David had done displeased the Lord."

But is that the end of the story? Are we simply left with our humanity in its sin and evil? The real interest lies in how David comes to confront himself in his evil as a persecutor of all that he knows as true and right and good. Nathan the prophet, with great literary wisdom, tells a story about a rich man with many flocks and folds and a poor man with only one little ewe lamb which he loves as a daughter. The rich man takes the poor man's little ewe lamb and kills it to provide the rites of hospitality for a wayfarer. The story is simply told. David reacts strongly to the injustice of the rich man's action. He says he deserves to die "because he had no pity," no mercy. I find that particularly telling. "Because he had no pity." Justice and mercy go together; "mercy seasons justice," perfects it, as Portia says in Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice. Nathan says simply but powerfully to David. "Thou art the man." The parable has been told to confront David with the evil of his own actions.

How then does David respond? He doesn't try to excuse himself. He doesn't say there is 'your truth' and there is 'my truth,' the contemporary betrayal of any truth. He doesn't blame his culture, his upbringing, and his privileged way of life and status, again another contemporary trope. In other words, he doesn't blame anyone else for what he himself has done. He simply and beautifully says, "I have sinned against the Lord."

This is the logic of the great penitential psalm, traditionally attributed to David, Psalm 51, and often treated in the commentary tradition as David's confession of sin with respect to Bathsheba and Uriah. "Against thee only have I sinned and done that which is evil in thy sight"(vs.4). The logic is wonderful. All sin is fundamentally against God, the principle of all truth and order. Such is the way in which the dynamic of the Ten Commandments are revealed as intimately connected and interdependent but above all as grounded in the love of God without which the love of neighbour is negated as nothing. We can only love one another and even ourselves in the love of God is the deep lesson of Holy Week.

What we see in the story of David being brought to account and to the truth of himself is what belongs to the pageant of Holy Week. We behold our sins in beholding the God whom we persecute and deny by beholding Christ. We are at once the persons of sin, "thou art the man," and yet we behold Christ, the redeemer and saviour of the world. "Behold the man" who is "the Lamb of God that takest away the sin of the world." We behold ourselves in him that we might say with Matthew that "truly this was the Son of God"; with Mark, that "truly this man was the Son of God"; with Luke, that "certainly this was a righteous man"; and with John that "[we] might look on him whom [we] have pierced" and so be pierced in our hearts at once in sorrow and in joy. "Thou art the man," we realize about ourselves as sinners in beholding Christ who is the Lamb of God. "Truly this was the Son of God" and "thou art the man" go together.

"Truly this was the Son of God"

Fr. David Curry
Palm Sunday, 2022

Link to audio file

https://www.dropbox.com/s/mhoivku9krher4l/Palm%20Sunday%20Christ%20Church%208am%20HC%2010%20April%202022%20mp3.mp3?dl=0

"Thou art the man"

Nathan's words to David seek to convict his conscience about his sins. So, too, the accounts of the Passion present a compelling picture of our humanity in all of its sin and disarray, in all of the confusions of our incomplete loves. At the center is Jesus in his encounter with us. The Passion according to St. Mark begins with the encounter between Jesus and an unnamed woman "in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, and as he sat at meat," as Mark tellingly notes. It begins with Jesus in the company of the afflicted; in short, with us in our afflictions. As Isaiah puts it in the lesson, "in all their affliction he was afflicted."

The unnamed woman - identified by John as Mary of Bethany and later in the commentary tradition as Mary Magdalene - breaks open an "alabaster box of ointment of spikenard, very precious" and pours its contents on his head. She anoints him. Why? Is she acknowledging him as the Messiah, the anointed one of God? Her action excites indignation, anger and division as if she has done something wrong. Jesus responds "let her alone; why trouble ye her? She hath wrought a good work on me: for ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good. But me ye have not always. She hath done what she could; she is come to aforehand to anoint my body to the burying." He names his death, his embrace of the realities of human sin. Yet he acknowledges the good in her action even as he convicts our consciences about our neglect of the sufferings of one another. Her act belongs to one of the acts of corporal mercy with respect to the burying of the dead. Her act, too, is an act of sacrifice, an act of love towards Jesus.

"The poor you have with you always" does not mean our neglect of them. Jesus is challenging us about whether we make any effort to do good towards those in need. There is no illusion that we can solve all the problems of inequality and poverty and suffering in our world but there is no mistaking the idea of an obligation to do whatever we can. This goes to the logic of Christ as "the mediator of the new covenant" and so to the meaning of his passion as the ultimate reconciliation and restoration of our wounded and broken humanity. It means encountering ourselves in our dealings with one another. No sooner does Jesus say that what "she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her," then Judas Iscariot goes to the chief priests to betray him unto them.

What unfolds is Mark's account of the supper in the Upper Room where Jesus says to his disciples that "one of you which eateth with me shall betray me." It excites a questioning on the part of each. "Is it I? Is it I?" It is the point of the accounts of the Passion to excite in us self-examination about the ways in which we have betrayed the truth and goodness of God in one way or another. Jesus takes bread and takes the cup; he identifies himself with the bread and the wine of the Passover. It signals the sacramental ways in which we participate in his Passion. "This is my body." "This is my blood of the covenant, which is shed for many."

This is immediately followed by the agony in Gethsemane where Jesus rather gently convicts us of our own weaknesses. We fall asleep. "Couldest not thou watch one hour?"

Once again, we confront ourselves. The same logic unfolds with the kiss of Judas, with the accusations of the chief priests, along with the elders and scribes, and with his being beaten and condemned to death. And Peter is there, "following afar off," observing all of these things at a distance.

The beginning of Mark's Passion ends not just with the threefold betrayal of Peter but with how he confronts himself in his betrayal. Like David, he is the man of sin, the man who has betrayed his friend. The cock crows twice, "and Peter called to mind the word that Jesus had said unto him, Before the cock crow twices, thou shalt deny me thrice." He confronts himself in the words and figure of Christ. What does he do? He does not attempt to deny it nor to excuse himself. "When he thought thereon, he wept."

Such is *metanoia*, repentance. It is about our being recalled to Christ and his truth which allows us to confront ourselves in our sins. The tears of Peter are like the precious ointment poured out upon Christ's head. They are an acknowledgment of our sins and failings through our awareness of the greater truth and goodness of God. We confront ourselves and weep for our sins that are our betrayals of love. To know this is our good.

"Thou art the man"

Fr. David Curry
Monday in Holy Week, 2022

"Thou art the man"

It is an ugly scene. The continuation of the Passion according to Mark sets before us the scene of Jesus being hauled before Pilate who then hands Jesus over to be crucified. He has acquiesced to the mob, to the madness of crowds. "Why what evil hath he done?", he even asks while giving in to their will. "They hated me without a cause," as the Psalmist puts it (Ps. 35.19; 69.4) which John in turn references (Jn. 15.25).

The continuation of the Passion in Mark portrays us as the persecutors of Christ in its different modalities: the religious leaders of the Jews, the Roman authorities, like Pilate, the callous violence and mockery of the soldiers. Even in leading him out to be crucified, they have to "*compel* one Simon a Cyrenian" "to bear his cross." There is no good to be found in ourselves. "Thou art the man." We confront the forms of human evil in the figure of the crucified.

He is crucified with two thieves. "They that passed by railed on him" mocking and insulting him. Words of evil intent. Such is the viciousness of the madness of crowds; we are united only in our evil. We are meant to see ourselves in that crowd. But how can anything good come out of this?

Only by contemplating the one and only word from the Cross which Mark and Matthew alone provide. "*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani*. My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It captures our attention. What is he saying? To whom is he calling? Elijah? We don't even get that right. It is a prayer from the Psalms, Psalm 22, a prayer to God out of the depths of human sin and misery. It is Israel's prayer out of the experiences of suffering and hardship, a prayer which gathers into itself the whole range of human sin and suffering in the feeling of abandonment, of desolation and aloneness. Yet as a prayer it looks to God; not as Father, a name which takes on a specific meaning of identity in the Christian faith, but simply as God. In this word, we confront ourselves in the radical meaning of sin which is nothing less than our alienation from God. "Thou art the man." This is us in our sins.

But in confronting ourselves in our sinfulness made visible in the crucified Christ, we confront the truth of God which our sins attempt in vain to deny. Christ dies on the cross, crying out with a loud voice, and giving up the spirit, Mark tells us. Yet that is the moment when the Centurion seeing all of this says "Truly this man was the Son of God." This is the good of the Passion in all of its violence and evil. To see the goodness of God in Christ precisely through the madness of crowds.

"Thou art the man"

Fr. David Curry
Tuesday in Holy Week, 2022

"Thou art the man"

Luke's account of the Passion has a certain literary quality and a certain inner intensity to it. It takes us into the heart of Christ, on the one hand, and reveals to us our hearts, on the other hand. With Luke we see Christ's interrogation of Peter at the last supper, itself a scene in which Luke provides a deeper understanding of the new covenant that his Passion and Resurrection accomplish. The interrogation of Peter serves to highlight the more dramatic form of Peter's betrayal at the end of today's Gospel reading.

With Luke we feel something of the intensity of Christ's agony in Gethsemane, the real struggle of the will of man with the will of God, "nevertheless not my will but thine be done." The prayer of Christ is pictured in its intensity with the graphic image of his sweat being "as it were, great drops of blood." The heart of Christ is opened to view.

But our hearts too are on display in the kiss of Judas - our betrayals of Christ, graphically signalled in Christ's gentle but firm and haunting words, "Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?"Our hearts are on display in the smiting with a sword of the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear - our violence in the intensity of the moment which is immediately countered by Christ's word and act, "suffer ye thus far" and "he touched his ear, and healed him." The contrast is powerful and telling between the disorders and violence of our words and deeds and the gentleness of Christ's words and deeds.

The drama reaches a crescendo in Luke's account of Peter's betrayal and most especially in terms of how Peter confronts himself in his betrayal. In a masterly and almost painterly touch, Luke tells us that after Peter's third betrayal not only does the cock crow but "the Lord turned and looked upon Peter." With Luke, it is the look that convicts Peter; "and Peter remembered the word of the Lord."

What is that look? In keeping with the inner intensity of Luke's portrayal of the agony of Christ and the gentleness of Christ, it is a look of compassion and love. Such a look convicts us far more than words of angry condemnation, far more than looks of judgement. "Thou art the man," Christ's look says to Peter, a look that recalls us to the truth which we have betrayed. In so doing, we are being recalled to the truth of ourselves as found in Christ's love. It is over and against our sins but is accomplished through our encounter with ourselves. "Thou art the man," indeed.

Such is the light of Christ which illumines us even in the shadows and the darkness of our sins. And such too is the meaning of Tenebrae in the intensity of the Psalms. They call us to account. They call us to Christ.

"Thou art the man"

Fr. David Curry
Wednesday in Holy Week, Tenebrae, 2022

"Thou art the man"

"A new commandment I give unto you that you love one another," Jesus says. But what is new about that? Haven't we heard the commandment "to love God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" from Deuteronomy (6.5) to which Mark has added "and with all your mind"? Haven't we heard from Leviticus (19.18) "to love your neighbour as yourself? How then is this a new commandment?

Because of the service and sacrifice of Christ which gives a new meaning to our lives and our loves. They are intensified in the Passion of Christ. What is given a more intense meaning is the depth of human sin, on the one hand, and the greater love of God towards us precisely in our sins, on the other hand. The new commandment to love is about service and sacrifice undertaken in a myriad of ways as the rites and ceremonies of Maundy Thursday indicate.

The washing of feet, the institution of the Holy Eucharist, the stripping of the altar, the going to Gethsemane in prayer and vigil, the traditions of the Sovereign giving alms to the poor, are among those rites and ceremonies. In a way, they are all about opening us out to a new and deeper understanding about the love of God and the love of man because they are concentrated in Christ, true God and true man.

Holy Week immerses us in the Passion of Christ. The rites and rituals of this day serve to bring us to ourselves as sinners *and* as beloved of God. We confront ourselves in order to find ourselves in the deep love of Christ for our humanity. "Thou art the man," our Holy Week text, takes on a fuller significance in the *Triduum Sacrum*.

Perhaps no ritual is more intriguing than the Judas Cup ceremony instituted by the monks of Durham Cathedral in northern England in the 14th century. Following Holy Communion, a large cup or bowl called a mazer was placed before the monks. As Douglas Davies explains, "it was once called the Judas cup because the face of Judas was worked into its bowl so that when the monks drank from it they could see, as it were, the face of Judas looking at them and, in a sense, mirroring their own face."

We are meant to confront ourselves as the betrayers and the persecutors of Christ. To see ourselves in all of the events of the Passion is the purpose of this week. It is profoundly counter-culture because it is not about pointing fingers of blame at others or about wallowing in the competing forms of victimhood. It is about confronting ourselves as the persecutors and betrayers of God, the principle of all truth and goodness.

In so doing, our relation to one another and our world undergoes a radical change that negates the tiresome forms of self-righteousness, narcissistic obsessiveness, and virtue signalling that defines much of our contemporary world. As if it is all about us. As if it is all about 'look at me, look at me' or, even more, 'look at me looking at you looking at me,' as I like to put it. The paradox is that none of these features are really about knowing ourselves as we are truly known in Christ. In none of these modes, do we have the wisdom of Nathan simply saying to David, "Thou art the man." In none of these modes of behaviour do we confront ourselves as Judas, as sinners and persecutors, as betrayers.

Yet this is the great and necessary good of Maundy Thursday and Holy Week, the great good of Christ's Passion. Here is a mirror in which we might truly see ourselves and a window through which we behold the love of God.

Luke's continuation of the Passion gives us three of the last seven words of Christ from the cross. He gives us the first and last word, beginning and ending with the address of the Son to the Father, the gathering of all things back to God. "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" and "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." These words belong to the truth of our humanity as restored to God. But Luke gives us the second word which is also a word of forgiveness and restoration. It is his response to the prayer of the one who was crucified with him, the one who has recognized his own sin but also recognizes the innocence of Christ. "This man has done nothing amiss," he says and then says to Jesus, "remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus says, "today shalt thou be with me in paradise." The penitent has seen himself through Christ. He knows that he is the man, a sinner, and only as such can he seek the mercy of Christ, "remember me." It is to know as we are known in the knowing love of God in Christ. Christ's remembering is the principle of our remembering in turn.

For here is the love which carried himself in his own hands (Augustine, Ennarrations, Ps. 34)) to give himself to us, body broken and blood out-poured, the Lamb of God who wills to bear in his own body on the tree all the sins of our humanity. "Do this in remembrance of me." Here is the new commandment to love, a new commandment because it is only accomplished in him and him in us. But only if we can look and see that "thou art the man." Seeing ourselves in Judas; seeing ourselves in Jesus.

"Thou art the man"

Fr. David Curry
Maundy Thursday, 2022

"Thou art the man"

We have used Nathan's words as the interpretative text for the Passion of Christ throughout Holy Week. "Thou art the man," Nathan says to David even as Pontius Pilate says to us, *Ecce Homo*, "Behold the man," pointing to Christ wearing a crown of thorns and a purple robe, being scourged, mocked, reviled and scorned before being handed over to the madness of crowds to be crucified. We behold ourselves in beholding Christ. "They shall look on him whom they pierced," as John's account of the Passion (Jn. 19.37) concludes recalling Zechariah (12.10). The 'they' are 'we'. We are not the victims but the persecutors who confront our evil in the crucified Christ, the one whom we have pierced and nailed to the cross. We behold our sins made visible in him. Why? To be convicted in our hearts of our sin by beholding in Christ the love which bears our sins. Only so can they be overcome. "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world."

The scapegoat mechanism of blaming others for our sufferings and fears is completely inverted. We are not the persecuted but the persecutors. The scapegoat is the Lamb of God. "Behold the Lamb of God." "Behold the man." Behold ourselves at once as sinners and as redeemed in Christ but only if we can say with David "I have sinned against the Lord." For that is the good of Good Friday, the good of our atonement.

"It is finished" is the sixth word from the cross in the tradition of the preaching on the seven last words of Christ. This devotion was established in Peru by the Jesuits in the 17th century after several devastating earthquakes in Lima and from there carried back to Europe. It has shaped some of the great choral works of the Baroque period; for instance, Haydn's Seven Last Words. The third, fifth and sixth words of Christ come from John's Gospel which is read along with the lesson from Hebrews on Good Friday. Here is the love that is "the propitiation for our sins," that is to say, the atoning sacrifice which makes us one with God and with one another. It means beholding the crucified and beholding our sins in him. "Thou art the man" is about confronting ourselves in the one whom we behold on the cross. "It is finished" refers to the overcoming of all sin that separates us from God and from one another.

It also means beholding ourselves in one another. Thus the third word from the cross bids Mary, his mother, to "behold thy son" in John, the beloved disciple, and bids John to "behold thy mother." In other words, Mary is to see him in John, and John is to see her as his mother in Christ. It is a form of love, a form of mutual indwelling or coinherence grounded in the eternal coinherence of God as Trinity. Beholding one another in loving care means beholding one another in Christ. He gives John to her and he gives her to John. It captures wonderfully the unity of the love of God and the love of man in Christ. It is the meaning of Christ's atonement. Our being one with God through Christ's sacrifice unites us to one another in loving service.

The fifth word provides the motive principle, "I thirst," Jesus says. In and through the physical agony of the crucifixion there is Christ's thirst or will for our good, for our salvation, his thirst for the will of the Father. His thirst is at once physical and spiritual;

it is about our life in the body of Christ. His thirst for our good is greater than our folly and ignorance. “They know not what they do.”

There is something profoundly disturbing, irrational and frightening in the violence of the mob, in the madness of crowds. It is the surrender of our own conscience to the pressures of power, a loss of our freedom to the good and a loss of the dignity which belongs to our lives together in the ordered life of the body of Christ and, by extension, to what belongs to “peace, order and good government” - a much neglected formula which once defined Canadian political life. The current gnostic and technocratic flight from the world serves the self-interest of the political elite but it is a negative freedom which serves only the few. Good Friday is profoundly counter-culture in calling us to the positive freedoms of our lives in service and sacrifice and not in self-service. It is grounded in what we behold.

“Thou art the man”...“Behold the man.” Both phrases speak to our awakening to ourselves in our disorders and disarray. “Behold the Lamb of God.” Behold the crucified Christ. This speaks to the love which unites and perfects, the love which forgives and restores. Here on the cross the book of love is opened for us to read (Lancelot Andrewes). For it is only in the love of God that we can behold ourselves as sinners and so behold the love which makes us at one with God and with one another. Is that not the great good of Good Friday?

“Thou art the man”

Fr. David Curry
Good Friday, 2022

"Thou art the man"

Nathan's word convicts David of his sin. It leads to his confession. "I have sinned against the Lord." Sin is death in contradiction to life. But life is greater than death. This is something which the quiet of Holy Saturday reveals as we gather at the tomb. The full meaning of Christ's death on the Cross begins to be explored through our quiet watching at the tomb in the readings for this day. What we contemplate is Christ's death as the means of God's overcoming of all that separates us from God and from one another. Holy Saturday points to the divine will to be reconciled with the whole of his sinful creation. Such is the meaning of the creedal teaching known as the "descent into Hell."

We are meant to see ourselves in our sins in Christ. As 1 Peter 3 puts it, "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit." The fuller extent of that mystery is that this is, in principle, universal, for all, because "he went and preached unto the spirits in prison," the prison of death, picking up on the imagery of Zechariah at Matins. "As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your captives free from the waterless pit" (Zech. 9.11). The Epistle points to this as a "figure" symbolising baptism. It is the transition from death to life "by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" which we await.

The Gospel reading continues the Holy Week theme of persecution, namely of us as the persecutors of God in Christ. It is the attempt to seal the tomb against the thought - the conspiracy theory of us as persecutors - that 'they', the disciples, might come to steal the body and then say, "He is risen from the dead." Such is the extent of the violence of persecution even in the vain attempt to kill the idea already present that there is something different, something unique, something compelling and transformative in Christ's crucifixion and death, something greater than death.

Such is the divine will to be reconciled with the whole of sinful creation. As the second lesson, again from 1 Peter puts it, Jesus "himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls." In going and preaching unto the spirits in prison, we have the idea of being gathered by God's Word who is light and life. God, as Thomas Aquinas, puts it, is "the beginning and end of all creatures but especially rational creatures." Such is the deeper meaning of Holy Week. Only God makes a way for us to him through death. But it means confronting ourselves as dead in our sins that we might become alive in Christ.

We watch and wait both now and at the vigil. We watch and wait expectantly upon God, the principle of all light and life. Our watching is our waiting upon that perfect union of God and man in Christ which makes us one with God and which is greater than sin and death.

"Thou art the man"

Fr. David Curry
Holy Saturday 2022

Christ is risen!

There is something quite powerful and moving about the Easter Vigil. It complements the intensity of Holy Week which has immersed us in the Passion of Christ by gathering us into its deeper meaning.

Our little country vigil simplifies the rituals of the Easter Vigil. There is the lighting of the Paschal Candle. There is the singing of the great Paschal Praeconium, the wonderful and joyous song and prayer of the Easter proclamation of Christ's victory over sin and death. There are the readings of some of the prophecies of Scripture that belong to our thinking about the Passion and its meaning as realized in the Resurrection. There is the renewal of our baptismal vows, our dying to sin and to ourselves in order to live to God. And, finally, there is the Lauds of Easter morning. Tomorrow we will celebrate the Easter Mass.

Vigils are about our watching and waiting. The Easter vigil is our watching and waiting upon God in the work of human redemption accomplished in Christ's Death and Resurrection. The Paschal Praeconium proclaims and teaches us the deep theological meaning of Christ's Death and Resurrection. This is the night which illuminates our understanding about God as essential life. "The night is come" in which Christ triumphs over the darkness of our world of sin and death. "The night is come" in which we are "delivered from the shadow of death" and are "renewed and made partakers of eternal life." All that stands between God and the world, between God and man is overcome in Christ who reconciles all things to God.

Our watching and our waiting in the great Vigil of Easter is the highest activity of our humanity. We can only watch and wait upon God but in so doing we learn who we are as God's children. That is the great blessing because it counters all of the false notions about what it means to be ourselves in our contemporary culture. We are not cosmic orphans cast adrift in an indifferent and unfeeling universe, cast out into a hostile world. We are not abstract autonomous individuals isolated and alone, trapped in ourselves. Nor are we merely bots, cogs in the machine of our technocratic culture. We are recalled to God's creation and to our life with God, a life which connects us with the world and one another. We are quite literally freed to God and so to a free relation with one another in loving care and compassion. We discover the truth of ourselves in the body of Christ.

The joy of the Vigil is our rejoicing not in ourselves but in Christ. Christ is our life. "Rise heart; Thy Lord is risen. Sing his praise without delayes," as George Herbert's poem, Easter, puts it. Sing his praise always.

Christ is risen! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Fr. David Curry
Easter Vigil, 2022

"Christ is your life. Christ is all in all"

I know. You have heard it over and over again, perhaps even on Good Friday. We know the end of the story, it is commonly said, the happy, clappy ending of Christ's Resurrection that risks eclipsing Good Friday and the Passion of Christ. We may think that Easter is mere wishful thinking, a kind of hope against the experience of reality, the reality of a world of misery and hurt, of violence and destruction. That it is an escape from reality.

We get it wrong. The Easter celebration of Christ's Resurrection is not the end of the story but its radical beginning. Paul in Colossians states the deep truth about our life as "hid with Christ in God," the one "who is [our] life." But not just us - the few, the elite over and against the deplorables, the others, the 'them' whom we despise - no. "Christ is all in all." His Resurrection reveals the radical truth of our humanity as found in God.

We get it wrong. The Gospels of Eastertide show us how to think it right. They show us how the idea of the Resurrection and its reality comes to birth in human souls. They show us the awakening to the radical beginning. What is that radical beginning? That God is life. "In the beginning God." "In the beginning was the Word." "In him was life and the life was the light of men." "In the beginning" means "in the principle"; our life in that which ever abides. Christ's Resurrection is not simply an event in time; it is eternity in our midst. It cannot be contained in a tomb let alone the tombs of our minds. The Resurrection is the great break-through moment about essential life that is greater than death, the light that is greater than darkness, the good that is greater than sin and evil.

Postmodernism in its various forms is profoundly anti-intellectual, profoundly anti-spiritual, profoundly negative because of its weddedness to a technocratic way of thinking against which it rails in vanity. Why? Because it is trapped in the very problem which it seeks to escape. Technology *per se* is not the problem. It is our fixation on it as the form of thinking and being that is the problem, the problem of our linear thinking, of calculative reasoning, as Heidegger puts it, that eclipses meditative thinking. The consequence is nothing less than a loss of our humanity. It is anti-life. The paradox is great. The gnosticism of existentialism that pits the individual in his or her subjective experience against an indifferent and hostile universe parallels the technocratic culture in its flight from that world premised upon an absolute conviction about the isolated self. It seeks to flee the world but forgets, as Neil Postman observes about the issues of technology, that "there is no escaping from ourselves." Such an insight belongs to what he calls "the wisdom of the ages and the sages." The Resurrection is the Christian form of that wisdom.

Holy week is about confronting ourselves. But that is only possible through the truth and power of God without which our lives are but pretense and nonsense, folly and narcissism, sin and evil. Holy week has made that perfectly clear to us, if we have the eyes and the hearts to hear and learn.

The simple point is that Easter is the beginning, not the end; the beginning which has no ending. The simple point is that Easter goes before and makes possible, indeed demands, the rigours and intensity of Holy Week. The accounts of the Passion, after all, are written and can only be pondered in the light of the Resurrection. Far from being a linear journey, going from point A to point B, we have been engaged in the dance of the understanding, a kind of circling around and around the mystery of life and death as gathered into the greater mystery of God. The sorrows of the Passion are not eclipsed but deepened into joy even as the joys of the Resurrection are intensified by the sorrows of the Passion. The Resurrection never lets us forget the Passion. "Do this in remembrance of me."

The Resurrection concentrates everything on God in Christ, who is "the alpha and the omega," the beginning and the end. This is the Christian truth proclaimed in the Easter greeting. "Christ is risen. Alleluia, Alleluia, The Lord is Risen indeed. Alleluia, Alleluia." We are awakened, recalled, and reminded of what is necessarily prior to our own thinking and being. It is about how we are known in God through God in Christ who has engaged our world to bring us home to God.

Radical new life. I like to think of the Resurrection as the fullest expression of the idea of creation *ex nihilo*; God making everything out of nothing, out of himself, God making something greater out of the nothingness of our sins and evil. The Resurrection is the death of death, the negation of the negation. Easter in this sense is profoundly counter-culture. It counters our culture of death. We are dead in ourselves, buried in our fears and our animosities, in our obsessions and fixations. Easter bids us die to ourselves in order to live to God. In so doing, it proclaims the radical truth of our individuality and our humanity. We only live when we live with God and with one another. The Resurrection is the greatest possible affirmation of our individuality, soul and body. We are more though not less than our bodies; they belong to the truth of creation and thus to its redemption. The Resurrection is the triumph of life over all that negates life. The body matters; it belongs to who we are and how we are known in Christ. Death is the separation of soul and body; Christ's Resurrection overcomes that separation. The truth of our individuality is found in community, in the body of Christ. We are given a new way to think about ourselves and our world. Christ is our life.

Easter is not an add-on, a feel-good conclusion to an otherwise gruesome and ugly spectacle. No. It expresses the inner truth of all that we have seen in Holy Week. It marks the radical beginning of life, life not as a sequence of events but as the real event itself, the life which begets life upon life and negates death. Death is no longer the *terminus*, the end-point; death is changed and becomes the *transitus*, something which we pass through, a means to an end which never ends. It means passing through the grave and gate of death to our life in Christ. Christ's Resurrection is about nothing less than the proclamation of God as essential life who embraces everything in his life, even death. Christ's Resurrection is the death of death because it manifests the essential life of God. This is our life. Live it. Live in the joy of the Resurrection, the joy of the God who is life.

And what does all that mean you ask? It is simply to be alive to the presence of God, to Christ in our midst, the life which has no end, the life which gathers all things back to

himself. It sets us in motion to God and to one another, running and coming like Mary Magdalene, running and coming like Peter and John to the empty tomb and so into the beginning of an awareness of the mystery of the Resurrection as endless life.

"Christ is your life"

Fr. David Curry
Easter 2022