

Easter Vigil 2018 (March 31)

St. James Episcopal Church, Clinton NY

The Rev. Gary Cyr, Rector

**We entered this night in darkness,  
but we leave with eternal light. For that grace,  
we give a resounding Alleluia!!!**

As several of us were preparing for this week's many services, one of our bulletin editors found what appeared to be a typo: kingdom had been spelled kin-dom. When my assistant brought it to my attention, I simply smiled and said it wasn't a typo but intentional and not something new since I have been using that iteration of the word for some time, though mostly in my sermons and not written out in the bulletin.

The idea behind this rewrite stems from Feminist Theology's attempt to ask the following question: Why is masculine the default setting whenever we speak of God? (Kingdom = king, implies male; on the other hand "kin" implies clan, which speaks more to a familial relationship) This, in turn, raises other questions: Why is white the default when we speak of culture? Why is straight the default when we speak of love? Why is retribution the default when we speak of justice? What is being exposed in all these questions – and many others – are that they are social constructs; self-imposed norms that become the means by which we judge one another in an effort to subject our society to stability. It's the way we order things to avoid chaos and anarchy. Or so we tell ourselves. And we mine scripture to find just the right passage to justify our biases, rather than see the whole of scripture as God's effort to bring order out of chaos, which is very different from our hetero-masculinist, euro-centric, cis-gendered ideals.

In the various texts we just read – from both the Jewish as well as Christian Canon – we hear God's salvific plan. We hear of how salvation history unfolds, where God is at work seeking to mend a broken relationship between God's Self and creation as exemplified in

Adam's betrayal and desire to walk apart from God as the source of blessing. The consequences of that rebellious act are manifest in the multitude of ways we've constructed "norms" that alienate those who don't conform, or who appear, act, or worship differently. Instead of being curious about our differences, we have become fearful, which leads to all kinds of injustices. On this night, through these readings, we hear of God's answer to our waywardness and God's response to our ultimate act of rebellion: the crucifixion.

Jesus' message of radical hospitality didn't fit with the accepted norms of his day. They challenged the social and religious constructs that the people in power benefited from, at the expense of the general populace. Jesus wasn't afraid to transverse political divides, social etiquette, and religious sensibilities. Jesus challenged authority and spoke truth to power such that he aligned with outcasts and sinners, or at least those whom the authorities deemed illegitimate aliens unworthy of basic human respect. Jesus embodied what God sought: compassion and empathy, mercy and forgiveness, grace and love. Especially love. Jesus' final mandate was to serve one another, to love another as God loves them. And it got him executed by the state, all with the religious authority's blessing and the people's consent. Accepted norms must be preserved at all cost, even the cost of an itinerate preacher.

The cross is humanity's seemingly final answer to God's desire for relationship. It's a huge "no". However, God has judged humanity and creation worthy of love regardless of the cost to God's Self. On this night, we celebrate God's reply to our "no" with God's own "no" through the cross. God takes an instrument of capital punishment, a tool of intimidation, and transforms it into a symbol of liberation and hope. In response to humanity's desire for retributive justice, God replies with God's sense of restorative justice, such that we are a forgiven and redeemed people. Through Jesus' resurrection we experience new life in a restored covenant relationship with God; where, in the waters of our baptism, we participate fully in the resurrection experience. As such, we are the Body of Christ made manifest as we gather to celebrate the Paschal Feast: Holy Communion. As the Body of Christ, we are a resurrected people, an Easter people, and that is Good News worthy of being shared. God's

radical act of self-giving love in transforming the cross into a symbol of hope is the fulfillment of salvation history. We entered this night in darkness, but we leave with eternal light, the living Light of Christ. Through this Light we are liberated from our self-constructed norms of separation and distortion, our default social settings that exclude and divide. In the Light of Christ, as a resurrection a people, we bear Good News and give witness to God's radical hospitality by loving our neighbor, whoever they are, as we are love by God. For that grace, we give a resounding Alleluia!!!