

I think I'm going to accidentally start with an advertisement for Patty's forum after church today. She'll be sharing about the liturgies of Holy Week and I promise we have not colluded on this if this aligns, but I need to tell you about one of those liturgies, the Easter Vigil. If you've never been, then you've probably heard about it from a clergy person, because us clergy types and soon-to-be clergy types are all obsessed with the Easter Vigil. And because we love it so much and we want you to come and experience its awesomeness, we might fail to mention that it lasts at the very least...two hours. Why is it so great, you ask? Great question! Well, I'm tempted to tell you it's the fire. And there is fire, so definitely come for that. But it's also our favorite because it is when we recall all of salvation history, when we recount the story of our faith, of a God who created us out of love and for love. We begin with the wonder of God's creation at the beginning, to God's promise after the Flood, to the Israelites being freed from slavery, to God's offering of salvation to all who are weary, to this weird little story about dry bones that God breathes life back into and they get tendons and skin again. And then we get to break out that shiny happy word of praise that we gave up for Lent

and hear the New Testament promise that in baptism we die--and rise--with Christ and then of course our last reading is the gospel reading, the good news, of Christ's resurrection. Death is never the end of the story. God in Christ is in the business of new life. This is good news!

The first Easter Vigil I went to I was in my early 20s and I was smitten by the whole service, but especially by some versions of the stories I heard. The Exodus story of the Israelites being saved from their oppressors by the parting of the Red Sea was not just read but was sung. And it was led by a Cantor who happened to be my best friend Anna's dad. He would sing the story and then the congregation would pop in with this hilarious (yet violent?) response: "Sing the song of freedom. God has won the victory. Horse and chariot he cast into the sea!"

While I had to wrestle with the horse and chariots being cast into the sea part, I became an Easter Vigil devotee for life! Recalling God's creative and redemptive love story throughout time and space caught me, rooted me, and inspired me. Recalling, remembering... this is what we do, why

we gather. We know that we are not the first or the last to face giants that feel too big and too mean or too, shall I say, evil.

In today's reading from the Prophet Isaiah, we hear a direct reference to this very Exodus story: *"Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior...."* Then he says, *"Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old!"* Wait. What? Do not remember?? Isn't that what I just went on about? How good it is to remember? Isn't that what we just were told to do? Remember how the Lord our God saved the Israelites, saved us, from suffering and death by parting the Red Sea?? So why the turn? Do *not* remember??

The next line is our clue. *"I am about to do a new thing, now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."*

I WILL make a way. Not I made a way in the past. But I will. I am about to do a new thing. Or in another translation: Behold! I am DOING a new thing!”

God is not only at work in the past. This is why God via Isaiah says here “not to remember” when over and over the call is to remember. We are not to remember if we remember only to see God in the past. No, God is at work NOW. God is making a way now. God is parting the sea in our hearts, in our society, in our chaos. NOW.

God is saying through Isaiah, don’t look back to the past and yearn for it as if I’m only there. I am with you *now*. Always. Behold! I am doing a new thing!

Perhaps surprisingly at first glance, the gospel story actually calls us to this same awareness. Judas pretends to care about the poor and asks why Mary would “waste” costly perfume to anoint Jesus’ feet. Mary recognizes the incarnation of God right in front of her. Judas, pretending

to care about the poor, suggests using that money more wisely, maybe thinking about the future, and doling out that money in smaller doses over time. We miss the point if we take Judas's question seriously as if he cares about the poor. Jesus, of course, truly cares about the poor. But he turns it back to Mary here because Mary gets it. She is earnest and honest in her actions. God in Jesus is with her NOW. God is parting the red sea of her heart NOW. She has heard within her spirit, "I am doing a new thing here." And she responds in a nonsensical, seemingly wasteful way. But it is not wasteful to know and trust and believe in the extravagant reckless love of God in front of her. She might not know what it means that he has to die, nor does she know yet to trust in his resurrection, but she dares to trust the God in her midst.

The other day, I heard my friend who is in recovery from addiction say that recovery is constant resurrection. Recovery is why he became a priest. Recovery is staring literal death in the face and knowing it does not have the final word. But recovery is also not just resurrection of course, not just the Easter we await. It is of course seasons and waves of

hardship and temptation. It is the Lenten season we are in of addiction. It is the Lenten season of constant honesty and admission of need, of constantly naming, “Hi I’m so-and-so. And I’m an alcoholic.” Recovery is a lot like other Lenten seasons we face now. It is the Lenten season of not being sure about the state of our democracy. It is the Lenten season of constant anxiety over jobs and rights and safety of loved ones and neighbors and college students. Recovery is trusting God again and again when it feels like the season of life is an unceasing Lent. Not just looking back in longing to that first time of being saved, getting sober and saying “that was nice. God saved me. Wish God were with me again.”

No, recovery, like resurrection, is continually trusting God NOW. Behold! I am doing a new thing! Says our God. I am in your midst. I saved you then. I will save you again. Do not look back solely in nostalgia for better times. Look back only to remind yourself that God was with you then *as God is with you now*. I will make a way in the wilderness and I will make rivers in the desert. I didn’t just do that in the

past, God says. I am doing it now. A way of hope through your despairing heart. A river of opportunity through endless dead ends of your job hunt. Overflowing water to quench our thirst for justice in this neverending news cycle of injustice. A path of dry land and peace through the red sea of war and violence. A way of kindness and courage through the wilderness of bigotry and rage. I am a God of the now, says the Lord. Behold! I am doing a new thing. Not just in the past, not in some imagined future that you must store up treasures for the future like Judas insincerely suggests. Now.

Where do you need God to make a way right now? Not where did you see God work in the past? Or where do you need God in the future, as if there is a limit to the amount of time and energy God has. God's saving love is a not a pizza. We don't receive our slices and then it's gone. No, God is doing a new thing right now. Again. Always.

I suspect I'm not the only one who has at least a few places where I would like to see the new thing that God will do. Our communal lives

are filled with fear and anger and distrust right now. Which is to say nothing of the particular ways that the walls might be caving in on any one of us right now. The overwhelming circumstances. The death of a loved one. The financial shortfalls. The loss of a job. The young adult child who can't find their way in the world... The wilderness of our lives can seem endless. The desert of our fractured society, a barren wasteland. And yet. And yet

*“ Who makes a way in the sea,
A path in the mighty waters,
Who brings out chariot and horse,
Army and warrior..
Do not remember the former things,
Or consider the thing of old
I am about to do a new thing;
Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
And rivers in the desert.”*

Behold! A new thing. May we know God is right NOW, in our very midst.