

## **Pastor Roy's Sermon – Vigil, April 7, 2012**

The children of Israel are slaves in Egypt. God tells Moses to lead them to freedom. Finally Pharaoh consents and orders them to go. Pharaohs don't say things like, "Well, if you really want to go, I guess I'll let you go, after all, your God has been trashing my kingdom." No, he yells, at the edge of sanity, "Go, get out of my kingdom, and never come back." Of course, after they leave, he changes his mind. But the people are already on their way toward the promised land. The reed sea is in their way, they can't get across it—they are trapped. Strangely enough they find safety by walking straight into the trouble. Moses parts the water, they cross on dry land. Pharaoh's army pursues. Here, the Egyptian weapons of war get in their way. The chariots' wheels get stuck and the whole army perishes. The instruments of bondage become the source of destruction for the oppressor.

In the tradition of the Bible, salvation comes not from focusing on one's troubles or running from them, but by living with trouble as we draw strength from the source of goodness all around us. Trusting in the goodness of God we need not fear trouble, but know that there is always life beyond it. In Isaiah's words, "So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it." Hope is found in receiving the word, the wisdom of God.

Jonah is another example. He entrusts himself to God even though he has not followed the command of God. He tells the sailors to throw him overboard when the storm threatens to kill them all. Finally they do. Even in disobedience, Jonah brings Gentiles to fear and serve God. He prays from the belly of the fish after his entombment for 3 days and 3 nights.

Three friends refuse to give false worship to Nebuchadnezzar and his idol. The king tauntingly gives them a second chance to worship. "No god can rescue you from my hand. I have the power of god—you have no hope." They shock him by telling him they will not bow down, their God trumps his false power anyway and even if they aren't saved, they still side with their God and reject his god and his claim to omnipotence. In the tradition of kings, he flies into a rage, seeks to avenge his honor, and demonstrate their weakness by his overwhelming might. In a wonderful demonstration of the feebleness of any who stand against the mercy of God, they are rescued by an angel that allows only their ropes to be burned off in the fiery furnace.

Truly amazed, Nebuchadnezzar instantly realigns himself with this God who really does matter. He had thought his word was final, but he learns that he too is part of creation and does not make the rules. Nebuchadnezzar confesses that "there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way."

These passages speak of resurrection and the faith that takes us through trouble and death into life. Faith in God is about trusting in One beyond eating, drinking, breathing, and staying alive. God holds our life and the meaning we attach to it. We learn this living faith from the Scriptures, from one another, and by sitting in the presence of the One who holds it all together.

Tonight we celebrate the resurrection of him who entrusted everything into the able care of the Creator. We know resurrection not based on what it means to rise from the dead but based on what it means to release everything into the able hands of God. Resurrection is God's eternal "Yes" in the face of our Jonah and disciple-like doubts, uncertainties, and fears. Whether we feel we are ready or not, God gathers us into a wholeness and peace which will never disappoint. We can rest in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ because we serve a living God. Thanks be to God.

He is risen! He is risen Indeed (2x). We, too, live by the power of God. Amen.