

Easter Vigil  
March 26, 2016

Pastor Lew Upchurch  
John 20:1-18

### “My God and Your God”

Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

It's already Easter morning in part of the world, and many like us are celebrating Easter Vigil, which means Christians around the planet are greeting each other with the same ancient greeting of “He is risen.” And this is nothing new. For over two thousand years our brothers and sisters in Christ have gathered around the same Word of God proclaimed and the same Sacraments administered. This should bring us great comfort and give us great confidence because just like them, through these means of God's grace, we have the same full and free salvation found in the same crucified and risen Lord Jesus! And it all began with one of the apostles bringing the good news that Christ has risen from the dead.

Think about this for a moment. We are part of something that is much bigger than our little slice of Wake Forest, or Wake County, or NC, or even the United States. As the words of the Nicene Creed confess, we are part of the “one holy Christian and apostolic Church.” The victory we are celebrating tonight is certainly about each one of us. This victory has great relevance and application to all our lives but it has also been relevant and applicable to all generations before any of us were even conceived.

What we are gathered here celebrating tonight has been done time and time again in numerous languages and in numerous locations. And the message is still the same. Jesus Christ overcame a horrific death on a cross and was raised to life by God the Father, which opened the gates of everlasting life to all who believe in him. And for most, the faith required to enter those gates of everlasting life begins in the same way--through the waters of Holy Baptism.

Just a few minutes ago, we witnessed the five Howard children enter into the one Holy Church through the waters of Baptism where they were liberated from sin and joined to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and this has been going on since Jesus commanded it over two thousand years ago. But he could never have commanded it if

he had stayed in the tomb dead. In fact, if he had stayed in the tomb, we wouldn't be here tonight because the central claim of Christianity is that Jesus, the man who claimed to be Israel's God in the flesh, rose from the dead. And that's just what happened. He is alive! He is alive to give people like you and me who are dead in their sins life! Just as he was alive to give people dead in their sins during the 1950's, the Victorian era, the Middle Ages, the Dark Ages and every age in between the same. And as John records, "on the first day of the week, while it was still dark," he was alive for Mary Magdalene.

Of course, she didn't get this right away did she? What might seem kind of odd to us as we read John's account of the resurrection is that at first, she mistook the risen Lord for the gardener! But we need to cut the woman some slack here. Even though she had witnessed many of Jesus' miracles of healing, feeding, raising of the dead, as well as his crucifixion, she was still blinded from seeing her risen Lord. We can chalk it up to it being dark, or her being exhausted, or her vision be impaired from all of her weeping but something with her was a little off. I mean, she didn't even seem to find it odd that two angels were sitting there asking her why she was crying. She just answered them as if this was totally normal. But then something happened. Jesus called her by name. The resurrected Lord Jesus simply said to her, "Mary." And that's when everything changed for her. She was hurting; she was doubting; she was confused and sad and then Jesus called her by name.

Mary was made alive again when the resurrected Christ called her by name. Dustin, Emily, Heidi, Savannah, and Bryson were made alive again earlier tonight when the resurrected Christ called them by name. All of us have been made alive again on this Vigil of Easter because our resurrected Lord has called us once again to remember that we have been adopted into his family. Just as Jesus said to Mary "my Father and your Father;" God is *our* Father and *our* God through the resurrected Christ.

We have been adopted into this family of God's grace through the resurrected Christ, and this family has been growing for over two-thousand years! How cool is this? How comforting is this? How absolutely awesome is this?

Now having been called by name, we gather as one body and partake of the feast of victory! Remember these words of praise we sang earlier? *Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain, whose blood set us free to be people of God. For the Lamb who was slain has begun his reign. This is the feast of victory of our God. Alleluia!* We celebrate

the victory of Christ over sin and death each time we come to worship and each time we come to his meal of Holy Communion, which we will do in a few minutes.

And when you do come, try and think of this holy meal as a meal of unity- a meal that has been shared throughout the ages instituted by Christ himself for the forgiveness of sins. Think of all the people before us who Christ came to in times of trouble, tumult, guilt, shame, and of course, the good-times. Think of a grandparent or great-grandparent who received Christ in the bread and wine maybe during a trying time in our country like the Great Depression. Think of a lonely peasant who labored in the fields of Saxony in the 1600's who received the same Christ. Think of a Christian in Ethiopia, India, Japan, Denmark, Germany, Russia, Brazil, Honduras, or even someone in Corinth, or Thessalonica, or Galatia in the early years of the Church. Think of the millions and millions of people who received just what we are about to receive in this Holy Sacrament— the fullness of Christ alone for our forgiveness. What a powerful image of who we are in this Body of Christ. And just as it was for them, it is for you!

Just like Mary, Jesus calls us by name. He is here and we can trust that through our faith in Him, we will never be alone because now we aren't our own. We are with Him now, and he is our strength in this life. He hears us; he feeds us, and he forgives us. And he will keep at it, just as he has done throughout the ages until he comes again in glory. He is my God and Your God. He is our resurrected Savior! **Amen.**