

March 8 2015
Lenten Evening Prayer

Isaiah 61:1-6

1 The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; 2 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; 3 to provide for those who mourn in Zion— to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory. 4 They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. 5 Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, foreigners shall till your land and dress your vines; 6 but you shall be called priests of the Lord, you shall be named ministers of our God; you shall enjoy the wealth of the nations, and in their riches you shall glory.

Philippians 2:1-11

1 If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, 2 make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. 5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, 7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, 8 he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Sermon

Grace to you and peace from God our Father,
God's Son our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit:
Amen.

Perhaps you've noticed by now that our Lenten series lives in a sort of tension, in the space between sin and salvation, sorrow and hope, ashes and lilies. Tonight, we once again inhabit this strained space, this pressurized place, considering the importance of this tension between death and resurrection.

One reason to love art is the ability for an artist to create tension within the piece itself. Sometimes art can help to carry the meaning, the significance, the depth of this tension, even beyond what words may describe.

Consider the song we just sang, “Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence.” The words carry such beautiful meaning for hope, words that signal the resurrection, words that speak of the incarnation of God, God taking human form, as well as of the greatest act of love we know, the Eucharist, where we share in the body and blood of Christ, a meal that strengthens us in our weakness, that prepares us for resurrection, that Saint Ignatius calls the Medicine of Immortality. What joy! What gift!

Yet, juxtaposed with these themes of salvation come an incredibly ominous, signaling our human estate, our sin, our need, our desperation. The tune tempers the lyrics of our hopeful resurrection with the present reality of our deep struggles, such that the

song lives somewhere in between death and resurrection.

King of kings, yet born of Mary // As of old on earth He stood // Lord of lords, in human vesture // In the body and the blood // He will give to all the faithful // His own self for heavenly food. There, somewhere in the midst of that tension, lies our own tension of death and resurrection.

Or, consider this sculpture of the crucifixion. Jesus' pronounced features highlight the pain of death, the struggle he faced. Gaunt and pointed, his bones seem to push through the iron. And yet, this comes contrasted with gold, highlighting those sacramental realities that bring life into our gaunt bones, that breathe life into the dust of our lungs. The

very wounds of Jesus – from the crown of thorns to the pierced side to the nails which held him to a cross – are gilded with the glory of new life. And he even leans off the cross, offering the first fruits of his death, seeming to say, “indeed, this is my body, the one that suffered such pain for you.” The Eucharist, it seems, is a painful glory, one that brings us from death into the resurrection, that acknowledges our tension and yet promises resolution.

In the midst of our tension, we’ve come to know we remain in need. We know that our sorrows and struggles must find the gift of the Gospel, the good news that we need to hear. Fortunately for us, that good news comes in the midst of this tension. Jesus lived life in the midst of death and resurrection just as

we do. The light of the world walked the valley of the shadow of death. And from this vantage point of tension, God offered a word of hope.

Our entire life occurs somewhere in this spectrum between death and resurrection. The dormancy of winter gives way to the blooms of spring. The dryness of the sandy beaches meets with moisture of the oceans' waves. Hibernation leads to rejuvenation. Grief gives way to comfort. Pain and pleasure provide the height of sensations. Fasting and feasting both connect us with God. And all point to this spectrum of death and resurrection.

For, you see, we come close to God not only in resurrection, but also in death. The Apostle Paul reminds us that precisely because we are united with

Christ **in death**, we are also united with Christ in the resurrection. Again, in this Philippians passage, we hear that Christ's submission to death on a cross led to his exultation at the right hand of God the Father. We come to abundant life, life to the full, as we journey through the deaths and resurrections of our own lives, all as images of the death and resurrection of Him who is our life, Jesus Christ.

Though we live life between death and resurrection, we also know that, in the promise of the Gospel, death no longer has the last word. Though we might fear death, our hope for resurrection lies within the stronger promise of one who rose from the dead that we all too might experience everlasting

life. And here, in the midst of our Lenten journeys, we may begin to taste that life now, here, in this place.

We may find practices of life. We may give of our abundance rather than hoard it in fear of scarcity. We may work toward peace despite our culture's propensity toward violence. We may risk our own health to visit the sick. We may pursue forgiveness rather than harbor anger. We may taste the life that we have to live, each time we live life in the image of God. Though the fear of death still beckons, God intends for us abundant life, and so we may live and move and have our being in the tension between death and resurrection, trusting that the one who rose from the dead will revive us today, tomorrow, and for all eternity. Amen.

