

“Light Sings all over the World”¹

I have some very good friends, people whom I respect for their devotion and for their intellect who feel that we should ignore the Old Testament, that the Old Testament has no worth for us as Christians. Instead, they say we are a New Testament people; we have Jesus. They say they are turned off to the Old Testament because God is always angry, God is always smiting people and God shows no love or tenderness for the Israelites much less the Philistines, Canaanites, Moabites, and all of the other “ites” of the Hebrew Bible.

Yet, I am sure you noticed that we began this evening’s service, one of the oldest liturgies in Christianity, exclusively with readings from the Old Testament. We only heard three readings, but the Book of Common Prayer offers nine reading options for the Easter Vigil all from the Old Testament. These readings are part of what is called the history of God’s saving acts or salvation history. They cover nearly all of the Old Testament from the beginning in Genesis to Zephaniah one of the last books in the Old Testament. The readings cover a wide range of biblical writings including the Torah, history, wisdom literature, the prophets and even the apocrypha. God’s love for humanity did not begin with Jesus. Rather as Jesus says in The Gospel of Matthew, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the [Hebrew Scriptures]²; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.”³

So this night of all night’s the night which we mark as our Vigil of Easter we read from the Old Testament to remind ourselves that God has been in the salvation business for thousands of years. Really from creation up to this very moment God has been tirelessly at work reaching out to people in love, wooing humanity like a lover, drawing us in loving kindness to the light that is the Holy Scriptures. It is not an accident that we begin the Easter Vigil with the lighting of a fire and processing that light into the nave of the church.

Tonight we remember that for all the powers did to destroy that which Jesus preached and taught, God’s power of love overcame them all. This evening nearly two thousand years after the crucifixion of Jesus that was supposed to put an end to the Kingdom of God, we have to go to history books to learn about the Sadducees and Pharisees who persecuted Jesus and the Roman Empire that put Jesus to death on the cross.

The Jesus Movement, as our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry calls Christianity, is alive and well. It is no longer isolated in Palestine and Asia Minor, but thanks to the apostles who preached Christ crucified and risen, it is a worldwide movement. The part of the Jesus Movement known as the Anglican

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² law or the prophets

³ Matthew 5:17-18 NRSV

Communion stretches around the globe. Despite the lamentations that the church is dying, every day people are being confirmed, baptized, and ordained.

The movement started by an itinerant rabbi from a backwater of the great Roman Empire thrives in the hearts and minds of people who seek rich and meaningful lives. Lives that bring light into the world, help bear the weights of others; and share in the trials of friends and strangers. These are people who seek justice for the poor and marginalized and for those without connections to power, influence or great wealth. Jesus is alive in this world in the hands of those who run soup kitchens, food pantries, medical clinics, legal aid programs, who work in hospice, who seek the truth, who love God over self, or rush in where angels fear to tread.

Thanks be to God for the persistent work of salvation that comes down to us this night across many centuries in the new light of Christ who is risen from the dead. There are many powers that still resist this light, but God shows us through the resurrection of Jesus that even death cannot put out the light. That same light of God is in us. Sing it out all over the world. Alleluia. Christ is risen.