

The Very Reverend Timothy E. Kimbrough  
Christ Church Cathedral  
April 23, 2011  
The Great Vigil of Easter (7:00 p.m.)  
Propers for the same

Home—we've come home tonight—immersed into our salvation history, the Story of our redemption from sin, the Story of our conversion, the Story of our release from bondage to Pharaoh. Tonight the journey to the empty tomb also heralds our arrival in Canaanland. Nothing matches this time in intensity. Nothing matches this space in its focus. Nothing matches this action through which God shows his desire for intimacy with his people. All roads have led to Jerusalem and Jerusalem is every place, every time, and every heart.

From the waters of the womb to waters of the tomb. We now stand with Haley, Henry, Christopher, Harper Ann, Jackson, Ryder, and Helen at the water's edge. To wait with them, to pray for them, even as they are ushered into the Body of Christ, is a privilege that brings with it great responsibility. Our confirmands, those baptized but now ready to make public, adult, professions of faith in Jesus Christ before a bishop in the Historic Succession, they, too stand at the water's edge ready to remember the day of their baptism even as these others are baptized. All of us will have our vows—our Christian identities refreshed in these waters. We use water to christen (to make Christ's) these baptizands. Water provided a home for them in their mother's womb. Water makes the trees green and the field ready for plowing and planting. Water fills all lakes, streams, rivers, and oceans. All things living are bound by their common dependence on water. All things living observe the ritual of water refreshment.

Water, our source of life, at the same time has the power to destroy. We only have to think back one year this week! Think of hurricanes, waterspouts, floods, shipwrecks, boating accidents, and life preservers. The awesome power of a waterfall or a white water rapid or a river overflowing its banks is not to be denied. One slip and you may find yourself gasping for breath or dashed against a canyon wall. You can't be sentimental about water. It can and will take the very life it nurtures.

Over it the Spirit of God brooded at the beginning of time. Through it Moses led the people of God to freedom. By it the People of God were sustained as they wandered in the wilderness. And in it, God soaks (baptizes) His people in His Spirit. A more fitting element could not have been chosen to bring us into God's family.

Water, burial, resurrection, and baptism? How do they fit? Local variants on the baptismal formula in RC Argentina have the priest push the candidate under water and say, "I kill you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit—and raise you to new life by the power of the resurrection." Indeed, in baptism, we die to our 'old selves' — we die to self-centeredness. We die to hate. We die to vindictiveness. We die to greed and sloth. We die to injustice. But you see, without this night, without Christ's victory over death, we could not be raised to new life!

We could die to every vice imaginable. We could die to every white lie or sin committed against our neighbor and God. But without the resurrection we would just stay dead. There would be no change, no alternative offered, no life beyond. Thus, as Jesus emerges from the sealed tomb with him comes the life of the world, our second

chance, the one we thought we had to earn but now are discovering we only have to accept.

Every appearance of water in our liturgical life reminds us of the day we were raised to new life in Jesus Christ. When the people are asperged (sprinkled with water), or when Holy Water is used to bless animals, palms, houses, nuptials, caskets, urns, you name it; when Holy Water is used we are refreshed by the Spirit in our baptisms and humbled by the tension of death and new life that confronts us in the water.

An increasing number of Episcopal churches and cathedrals keep Holy Water at the door of the church and every time you enter, you +bless yourself, having taken a little water on your fingers. It's not hard to think of the many places in our lives that might benefit from having access to such a Holy Water font—the entrance to our homes, just outside your boss's office, near the water cooler at work, at the bank, at the grocery store, at the mission, at school, at the ballpark, at the entrance to the State Capital, near the lock at the main gate at Riverbend, at the cemetery.

Haley, Henry, Christopher, Harper Ann, Jackson, Ryder, and Helen, as you are brought into the very presence of God through the waters of baptism and are cleansed from all sin—may you come to know the risen Christ personally, intimately, and fully. [Confirmands] when your travels take you far from the road on which you began, when you find yourself at a distance from your intended destination, when you wonder what it might mean to grow into the full stature of Christ, may this day, the day of your confirmation stand out as a marker, a sign, a post which point the way home.

The Triduum's artist, at the canvas split in two by a pale gray stroke across the center, yet joined by the diagonally thrown red stroke, has added yellow, purple, green, and blue to the red, white, and black of the last two days' pallet. The intense grief and listlessness that she had felt yesterday has been replaced with a healthy measure of focus and centeredness. No, that wasn't it. It was more like wild unbridled joy. She wanted to shout and did. She wanted to jump—and did! She wanted to take her paint-colors and simply throw them at the canvas risking however they might choose to land—and that's precisely what she did! A little blue here, a little green there, Yellow, Orange, Blue. It was amazing. It was brilliant!

“That's not art-work!” someone was heard to say. ‘Look at her she's just throwing the paint at the canvas!’ He who has eyes let him see. He who has ears let him hear. Christ, by his resurrection, has made all things new—and though no art medium can ever hold/express the joy which has been loosed in creation through the power of the resurrection, it puts the joy of all creation on display. You may say it's not art—but in it I see the pain of humanity released and the face of the angel who said to the women at the tomb, “Do not be afraid. He is not here. He is risen!”

Home—we've come home tonight—here is your salvation. Here is your redemption from sin. Here see of your conversion and release from bondage to Pharaoh. Here is your arrival in Canaan land. Nothing matches this time in intensity. Nothing matches this space in its focus. Nothing matches this action through which God shows his desire for intimacy with his people. All roads have led to Jerusalem and Jerusalem is now this place, this time, and your heart.