

Easter Eve

A Service of the Light with Renewal of Baptismal Vows.

So Joseph (of Arimathea) took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away.... And later the soldiers went with a guard ...and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

There is such finality about Matthew's retelling of the burial of Jesus. The body is taken down from the cross, wrapped in a burial shroud and placed in a tomb hewn from rock. A great stone is rolled in front of the entrance to the tomb closing it off from the world, from the light of the sun, from the fresh movement of the air. It is then sealed by the soldiers to ensure that nothing could get in and nothing could get out, total darkness, total silence, the end.

But we gather here tonight, trusting that this is not the end. We gather here holding in our hearts the promise of resurrection.

I once read on a greeting card the following words: Faith is the bird that sings in the darkest hour before dawn.

We too have faith that in the cold, grief stricken waiting of our darkest hour that God will not, has not abandoned us. We stand here tonight, as an act of faith, that in spite of what may be happening in our lives or the lives of those we love, in spite of how wretched or anxious, or lonely or sad we feel, God is the light that shines into our darkness, and the sealed tomb is not the end of the story.

One of my favourite paintings by Rembrandt is this one of the apostle Peter. It is one I often meditate upon through Lent. Here we see Peter kneeling with a look of utter despair and dejection upon his face. He has entered a world of deep and terrible grief, there is a lost broken look in his eyes. I see this as a picture of Peter during the dark hours of the night after Peter's heartbreaking denial of Jesus.

Much of the scene is in darkness, Peter is all alone. And yet there is a soft light that falls upon Peter, gently illuminating his face and his clasped hands. Peter appears to be unaware of the light, so enmeshed is he in his own pain and shame. And yet there is a light that begins to dispel the darkness surrounding him, redefining the moment before our very eyes. Peter is not alone. God has not abandoned him.

As we gather here, this Easter Eve, with a sealed tomb before us and what seems to be a tragic ending, God too is at work redefining our lives.

Just as in the darkness, deep beneath the earth, does the miracle of life begin in a seed or a bulb, so too is the miracle of life given birth in the broken body of Jesus in the tomb.

It is this truth, and the promise of Easter dawn that nurtures and sustains us in our faith journey.

It is what we bear witness to with our lives.

It is the firm ground upon which we stand when all seems lost and the pain of human experience seems overwhelming.

As we stand to reaffirm our baptismal promises this night, we stand with courage, with hope, and with deep joy, because, like the bird, we too sing of light and life in the dark hours before Easter dawn.