

Saint Raphael's Episcopal Church

Fort Myers Beach, Florida
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"New Every Morning"

A Sermon by The Reverend J. Alice Marcum
Saint Raphael's Episcopal Church
Easter Vigil 2006

In tonight's scripture readings, we have heard of God's faithfulness to humanity beginning with the creation of the universe. We have heard in Genesis how God created the stars, the sun, the moon, the earth and all that dwells within it and declared that all of His works were "Good". Humans were even given dominion over God's creation here on earth. God entrusted humans to be His own personal stewards.

Secondly, we heard of God's protection and deliverance of the Israelites from the Egyptians. We heard of how God, who rose up a leader from the Israelites to lead them out of the bondage of the Egyptians, destroyed their oppressors. Because of this Divine victory over the Israelites' Egyptian slave masters, the scriptures tell us, **"the people feared the Lord and believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses"**.

Thirdly, we heard of the promises given to the people of Israel, because of God's love for them. We were told that they were not only given a new land in which to live, but also a new heart and a new spirit. The only requirement that the Lord God asked of the Israelites in being His chosen people was to be obedient only unto Him and to serve no other gods. If they would submit only to the Lord God, then the Lord promised them, **"you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God."**

Fourthly, we heard how Israel had become like unto a valley of dry bones, because she had not been faithful to the Lord God, who had protected her, delivered her and defended her. Yet, even though Israel had abandoned God, God had not abandoned her. Instead, God gives hope to Israel through a vision given to the prophet Ezekiel. In this vision, we were shown how God can take even the dead dreams and destroyed hopes of His people and bring them back to life; because God is the giver of all life and He remains faithful to His people. God once again promises His people, **"I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act."**

Fifthly, in Paul's epistle to the Romans, we were told that we who have been baptized into Christ have become new creations. For in the waters of baptism our sinful selves have been destroyed, just like the Egyptians were destroyed in the waters of the Red Sea, so we too like the Israelites of old have been delivered from bondage. We have been set free to become alive to God in Christ Jesus. The old life has been washed away and we have been given a new life that no one can destroy, because we have been resurrected through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who conquered sin and death for our sakes. Because of God's faithfulness towards all who seek Him, even we Gentiles have been given the offer of this gift of salvation that is priceless.

In our final reading, we heard the story of the powerful event of Jesus' resurrection. This event was so powerful that it shook the very foundations of the earth, causing a great earthquake to occur. As the

divine power of the Almighty Father restored His only begotten Son, Jesus the Christ, back to life, an angel was sent to two faithful followers of Jesus, who witnessed this event, to reassure them of God's faithfulness. The scripture reads, ***"But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said.'"*** The angel's words 'as he said' is a reminder to us that the Lord always fulfills His promises to His people.

God is faithful even when we turn away from Him. His love and mercy for us is everlasting. From the beginning of creation, God has shown His faithfulness and love to all who seek His face. It is not God who has abandoned us, but we who have abandoned Him.

Whenever we seek our own way, instead of the Lord's, we are turning our backs on the One who continues to love us unconditionally. The writer of Lamentations tells us, ***"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies never come to an end: they are new every morning."***

We cannot stop God from loving us and being faithful to us. We can refuse to obey the will of the Lord in our lives by knowingly committing sins that the Lord has forbidden in His Word. Like the Israelites of old, our lives can become so filled with the lusts of this world that our spirits become as dry dead bones. Yet, God in His mercy and ever faithfulness to us has given us the gift of eternal life through the death and resurrection of His beloved Son.

Through God's gift of salvation, we can stand once again before our Creator as new creations, like our ancestors of old who were the first humans on earth. Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we too can be resurrected through the waters of baptism. Because of God's faithfulness to us through His gift of salvation, we can be filled with a new spirit and given a new heart.

God has shown Himself to be faithful to us. God wants to have a relationship with us through His Son Jesus Christ. Whether or not we choose to enter into such a relationship is up to us. How will we choose to respond to God's faithfulness? In the Book of Revelation, the message sent to the church in Laodicea gives us further insight on how we may choose to answer this question. ***"I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent. Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me."***

This evening as we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, may we choose to invite the Lord Jesus into our lives in a more personal relationship than we have ever known. May this Easter be the beginning of a new life in Christ Jesus. May we strive to be as faithful to the Lord as He is to us.

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