

The Great Vigil Of Easter C 2022
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The Resurrection: A Love That Makes Things A Mess

When I was a child, I attended Sunday school on a fairly regular basis. I seem to recall that, whenever we started talking about God, my teachers would describe him in one of these ways: That God is omnipotent, that is, God is all-powerful. Or that God is omniscient, that is, God is all-knowing. Or that God is omnipresent, that is, God is everywhere.

And as a child, those answers seemed to satisfy me, even if I didn't fully understand them. But if you asked me *now* what I thought about those definitions, I would probably say "not much." It's not that these ideas are unimportant; it's that there is so much more that we could say about God. Why stop there?

For another thing, to talk about God in those terms is so "out there." Words like these makes God seem so far away. However, it is to such words that many people run to, and even hide behind, when they start talking about God in a personal way; about how God feels about us; about how much God cares for all of us.

Tonight, we are reminding ourselves, and celebrating the fact that, not only is God “out there,” he’s also here with us. And around us. And within us. We are also remembering, and celebrating the fact, that God is absolutely head-over-heels in love with the human race.

A good example of what I’m talking about, comes from a movie I watched many years ago, entitled *Moonstruck*. In it, Nicholas Cage played a character named Ronnie, and Cher played a character named Loretta. The relationship between Ronnie and Loretta, throughout the movie, has been moving from friendship towards romance and love. But Ronnie has been deeply hurt in a prior relationship, and, despite Loretta’s encouragement, he is reluctant to let himself fall in love again.

But, towards the end of that movie, when Ronnie is beginning to give in to his love for her, he says to Loretta:

Loretta, I love you. Not like they told you love is, and I didn’t know this either, but love doesn’t make things nice, it ruins everything. It breaks your heart. It makes things a mess.

We aren't here to make things perfect. The snowflakes are perfect. The stars are perfect. Not us. Not us! We are here to ruin ourselves and to break our hearts and love the wrong people and die.

Now, I'll be the first to admit that it sounds like a strange profession of love. But tonight, it's actually pretty great. Because on days like today, we're reminded that God is a bit like that. That this is what God's love is like.

You see, the stories we heard earlier this evening, and so many others, describe some of the people that God fell in love with. And it was almost always a messy situation, because, time after time, God fell in love with (if you will) the wrong people.

Like a boat builder named Noah. Or a mixed up nomad named Abraham. Or a bunch of Egyptian slaves called the Israelites. Or a wild warrior-woman named Deborah. Or even a prostitute named Rahab. God loves the wrong people, and God's heart breaks every time the people wander away. Yet still God calls after us. God still pursues us. God still loves us.

Finally, God came to us personally, as a carpenter from Nazareth. But even then, even when God came to us in the flesh, it didn't make everything in the world turn out nice. His coming in the flesh didn't make things perfect — at least not in the way we think of perfection. He didn't take away death. He didn't fix the world. Instead, he simply joined us. He loved us so much he joined us in birth, and in life, and even in death.

That would have been enough, but God wants more. In fact, God wants us to join him in his mad, passionate, excessive love for the human race. He asks us to love others as he loves us. He asks us to take the same sort of risks with others, that he took with us. He asks us to bring his love into the world. And in doing so, he is also asking us to give up safety and security, in favor of witness and service. In other words, this is how we bring God's love into the world. And if all this sounds imprudent, or risky, or dangerous, that's because it is. Just ask Jesus, because that's what he did.

There's an old song that I used to listen to when I was growing up. One of the lines in that song goes:

“If you can’t be with the one you love, love the one you’re with.”

At the time, I thought that was pretty clever and sensible. But that’s not what God says. God says, “Be *my* love. Be the tangible expression of my love for everyone whom you meet. Love excessively, and passionately. Risk breaking your heart; take the chance of making your life a mess by loving others as I have loved you. Have the courage to ruin everything, and die for love.

But here’s the thing: while we are thinking about whether or not we should be doing these things, remember also that “*I will raise you up at the last.*” That’s what God says.

Too often, when people talk about the Resurrection, they don’t use that word. Instead, they talk about their “heavenly reward,” and in their minds, it’s the prize they get for living a “good life.” In truth, however, the Resurrection, and its power, is not so much a future heavenly reward, as much as it *an opportunity for courageous and risky actions right now.* The Resurrection is an invitation to spend your life passionately for other people, to love others as God has loved you. And these

things — our life and our love — God will honor. And God will redeem. And God will resurrect.

In other words, the Resurrection is a promise that we *can* risk breaking our hearts, and loving the wrong people, serving and witnessing, loving justice and mercy. We *can* take these risks because we *know* that the God of the Resurrection honors life, and gives it to us as a gift ... again and again and again.

So, let's get out there, and in the power of the Resurrection, and in the hope of the Resurrection, let's start bringing God's radical, and excessive, and lavish love to all the people we encounter. Because, in the end, that's what the resurrection is all about.

Amen.