

Raggs' Easter vigil sermon 2023

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

We made it! We had our *αγαπη* meal and footwashing. We celebrated the gift of the Eucharist with appropriate pomp and then stripped everything bare in preparation for a whole new beginning. We spent time in prayer and quiet, remembering all that was sacrificed on our behalf, letting our hearts be broken and healed again. We spent time in preparation and time in quiet. And when we were not here others were working tirelessly to make our celebration possible, practicing music and readings, gathering tools and decorations, preparing the church and our hearts and minds and bodies. And now we are here.

Tonight we lit the new fire as was done on hilltops before electricity – and we lit the light of Christ to guide us. We have heard some of the great stories of our tradition, how everything came to be out of the love of God, how God broke in to rescue people from slavery, how God brings life out of death even for the most hopeless, how God promises healing and hope to all.

The lights all came on when Jesus burst the bonds of death and came back to us, beyond all hope or reasonable expectation. We rang bells and shouted as we saw the light and the flowers.

The Great Vigil of Easter is our most enthusiastic service of the year, because this is the triumph of love over death. This is the ultimate revelation of God's love triumphing over everything that can be put in its way.

And we are privileged to be part of the community that shares that story and experience with the world. We are the Body of Christ, part of the communion that transcends time and space, serving the whole world in Christ's name.

And into this community we have invited Lauren. Lauren came to Saint Aidan's seeking a spiritual home, seeking a community that would embrace them and share the journey. Members of this community have joined Lauren in exploring the history and experience of the life of faith and have come to support and companion them through this part of the journey.

Christ is risen and is welcoming Lauren into the new life of loving service offered to all who wish to join.

In the early centuries of the Church, the Easter Vigil was the only time baptism was celebrated. Everyone joined the church at this great celebration of the triumph of love over death and the invitation to be the hands and feet and voice of Christ in the world. Now we have other feasts that can include baptism, but the Vigil is still the best time, because it is so steeped in the history and fabric of this community that transcends time and space.

We began at the fire outside and came in to share stories in the dark, stories from our deep past appropriate to tell around a campfire, and we rang bells and shouted as the lights came on and the resurrection was declared – and now we will gather around the font, filling it with the water of life, love, and welcome.

After Lauren has been baptized with the water and sealed with the Chrism that our Bishop blessed on Tuesday, at a service with all the priests and deacons of our part of the diocese gathered to renew our baptismal vows along with her, we will all be sprinkled with that same blessed water of life and we will welcome Lauren into our community, a community of continual renewal and hope.

This is a celebration of joy and hope, filled with promise for lives renewed and lived in service to the world. None of us knows what the future holds for us as individuals or for Saint Edwards as a church community, but we do know that we can count on one another because we have made promises to live in love and to support one another whatever the future holds.

May God bless us all with the fulfillment of those promises. Amen. Alleluia!