

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

This is the night. This is the night around which the whole universe turns. On this night, we not only remember the mighty acts of God: we let them come to us here, now. We live in them and we let them live in us. For they are, always, part of who we are, part of our heritage from the beginning of time, part of the path God has laid for the whole of creation from the beginning, pulled together and given the fullness of their meaning in and through the risen Christ.

For this is the night that God finished creation, and behold, it was very good!—All that abundance, that extravagance, that incredible variety, overflowing from the heart and mind of God, and all linked up together in a marvelous, intricate, delightful, beautiful dance. And it is *very* good.

This is the night God restored creation after the great flood that covered the whole earth, the night that God looked out at creation, newly emerged from the waters, showing signs of new life. And, yes, it was *still* very good. So God promised never to destroy it all again with a great flood. The overflowing rivers and streams, the flooded plains and flat places—all will emerge from their floods, because after this Great Flood, God made a covenant with the whole of creation, with the earth and the skies and all the creatures, including human beings, to cherish creation and fulfill it, again and again and again, year after year after year. And we have the sign of that promise spread across the sky as storms clear and the sun returns.

And *this* is the night that God heard the cries of his people, caught up in the bonds of slavery, pressed into grueling, endless service, generation after generation. Denied their freedom and their identity, unable to worship their God or live the lives their God gave them. God heard their cries and laments and outrage. God sent his prophet to advocate for, to *insist* on their liberation even though their oppressors would not listen and hardened their hearts. And then God brought his people out of slavery into freedom, brought them across the Red Sea on dry land, to rejoice, and to move on toward a land God gave them. This is the night when the Lord has triumphed gloriously over oppression and degradation. This is the night that God sets all his people free.

This is the night where God told Ezekiel to look at the valley full of bones, all life gone from them. The bones of the beloved—mothers, fathers, children, friends, lovers—and bones of the unloved too, and the unnoticed. And they were all very dry. And at God's command, Ezekiel prophesied to them, proclaiming God's own fervent desire that those bones live again. This is the night those very dry bones knit themselves up together, and put on flesh, and breathed in spirit, and danced with joy, and with them all who grieve, who mourn, who lament. This is the night that God opens the graves and the dead rise, living and whole.

This is the night that God gives us all new hearts, new desires, new visions. This is the night when burdens are lifted, where it doesn't matter that all too often we turn to God late in the game. This is the night when God's reign is revealed, and all are invited in. This is the night God gathers all people together, in one rich and joyful and loving community, overflowing with the love of God—a community where there are no more disasters, where oppression is ended, the injured and wounded are saved, and shame is turned to praise. Where isolation and alienation and the fear of death and the unknown are overcome. This is the night when we are brought home, and God is in our midst.

And all of this is part our lives. We live in these stories, and these stories live in us. And they all lead into the main thing. For *this* is the night that Christ is raised from the dead, trampling down death by death, and giving us eternal life. This is the night when life itself is freed from the power of death of all kinds, literal, metaphorical; the death of heart, or of mind, or of soul, or of strength, as well as the death of the body. All death is overcome, and stripped of its power.

For *This* is the night when Christ emerges from the darkness and closed-ness of despair, and of sorrow, Christ comes to us, clothed in light and life, spilling over to fill the whole universe with the love that is the power of God over all that afflicts and diminishes and damages any part of God's good creation.

This is the night when our current life is renewed, and we are given new life, life abundant, life with God—an eternal, heavenly banquet where no one is hungry, and all are welcomed, and cherished, and fed, and renewed. A heavenly banquet in which we partake even now and then go out to call everyone outside, in, call everyone home, to God. Everyone, no exceptions.

This is the night. All that God has done and will do, all that God loves and desires and longs for, for God's own creation as it grows to fulfillment—all that is joined together and given its meaning in the light of Christ, on this night. All of that is present with and among and around us, filling us with joy and peace, with faith and with hope. For *this* is the night that heaven and earth are joined and we are reconciled to God.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!... What can we do, but go out and ***tell everyone.***