

+ In Nomine Jesu +

Mark 16:1-8

Date: April 8, 2023

Liturgical Date: Easter Vigil

Title: God's history of salvation

*In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit*

*Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia!*

From creation to the flood to Job's redeemer to the four men unbound to the resurrection of our Lord, God is always working salvation. As we keep watch during this Easter Vigil, we recount with all of God's people the history of salvation that God works for his people. God constantly delivers his people from sin, death, and the devil, and God constantly saves his people for eternal life in God's perfect creation, the new creation.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. God's history of salvation is founded upon the creation that God prepares for man. God's creation is beautiful. Every part of creation comes forth, as God speaks the word, and there it was. God creates all of it, perfect and good. The light, the dry land, seas, and heaven, the plants, the sun, moon, and stars, the sea creatures and birds, and the animals - all created for the enjoyment of man. Only God could call forth the entire universe by his word and create a world that is good and beautiful.

God prepares the garden as paradise for man. God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God created man to live in this garden. God created man in his own image, created in truth and holiness and righteousness. Man had the law of God written on his heart, so that man delighted to serve God in willing obedience. God created them male and female, a beautiful distinction, a gift from God. God provides for future generations through this beautiful distinction, blessing them with the command to be fruitful and multiply. Thus, God's people were to grow in number, and God would dwell with his people, and God's people would dwell with him, forever - as death was not part of God's perfect creation.

But Satan slithered his way into the garden, working his way between God's word and God's people. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil looked good for food, but in the day that they ate of it, death crashed into the perfect creation. Man was created to live with God forever, but now man's days were numbered and he would return to the dust. Creation which came forth beautiful from the word of God now groans as a place hostile to life. What would God do to restore both creation and the man who was created to enjoy what God has made? Could God have taken a mulligan, wipe away the corrupted creation and start again anew? That would be admitting defeat. Satan had his way, and God could only call do-over.

Rather, God would make known his plan to work salvation for his people. God would send his own Son, into creation, in the flesh, the seed of the woman, to take into his own body

the curse of death, and, when he would swallow up death, he would make all things new again.

God sends his Son as a promise that death would not always reign and that man would be restored to live with God forever. This promise of salvation was handed down from Adam to Seth down further to Enoch who walked with God, to Methuselah, down to Noah. Yet the people at Noah's time were not of the same heart as the man whom God created in the garden. These men of Noah's time did not delight to serve the creator in willing obedience. So much the opposite. Wicked. Perverse. All the thoughts of their hearts were only evil all of the time. They did not honor God. They worshiped the creation. They followed the lusts of their own bodies and did what ought not be done.

That wicked and perverse generation grieved God so greatly that he considered to blot out all of mankind. Yet that promise of salvation through the seed of the woman must still be true. Noah was a righteous man who walked with God. Noah trusted God's promises for salvation, even as Noah was brought into that promise. Noah did what he could to be faithful in the midst of that wicked generation. He preached that the judgment of God is coming, repent, yet Noah convinced nobody from his generation, and only eight entered into the ark. Only eight were brought safely through water. as God is always working to save his people.

God saves his people from the adversary. Satan asks for Job specifically, ready to accuse Job of breaking the first commandment, as if Job only fears God because God has given him great blessings. Satan attacks Job until he has nothing left. No children, no possessions, no cattle, sores all over him, and yet Job does not sin against God. Clearly, Job is suffering, as his friends observe. Job can see his own life is now devastated, his own body horribly afflicted. Job can't see that Satan orchestrated all of the suffering, but Job is ready to receive good from God as well as evil.

Job doesn't see much of God's plan of salvation with his eyes. But now that Job has nothing, he focuses on what God will do to save him. Job will see God's saving work in the future. He will see it with his own eyes. For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!

The history of God's salvation points to the resurrection of all flesh. This body, created by God, no matter the afflictions in this life, no matter the attack and accusations from the adversary, will be made new. God will be faithful to his creation and restore what death has destroyed. God will save his people from death and the devil. God will save his people with a resurrection for their physical bodies, because these bodies matter. These bodies are a creation of God, and they will be restored.

Job sees that his body would be made new. This newness is predicated upon 'my Redeemer lives.' Death's days are numbered. The Redeemer is coming, to win back those bodies from the graves and make them new. As the Redeemer lives, so also his people. God himself would restore that rotten death-filled flesh. And, as if new flesh weren't enough, God heaps blessing upon blessing. Those bodies with new flesh will see God, face to face, seeing

God with their own eyes, not from afar, but dwelling with God, and God dwelling with them, providing for them, wiping away every tear.

Take courage, people of God, as your Redeemer lives. Daniel writes of the three young men who were exiles in a foreign land. Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah from the tribe of Judah were sent to Babylon. They were very knowledgeable, great learners picking up the literature and language of the Chaldeans. They stood before the king and were given names Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. The three men excelled in wisdom before the king. They were the best and brightest from Judah. But that didn't save them from Nebuchadnezzar's command.

Nebuchadnezzar set up his golden image, gigantic and imposing. Nebuchadnezzar set up the decree that whenever anyone hears the sound of all of those instruments, he must bow down and worship the image. The state religion demands everything, by threat of force. The state religion allows no exemption for conscience. The state religion doesn't give Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego a free pass because they are otherwise useful to the state. All must bow down to the state religion, or else there is a cost.

The king demands an answer. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands? The state religion only knows the sword which terrorizes in the present. The state religion knows nothing of God's history of salvation from creation to the resurrection. The God who created all things, who saved Noah in the flood, the Redeemer who lives, will deliver us out of your hands. We will not bow down. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego see the golden image. They see Nebuchadnezzar's anger. They see the fiery furnace, hotter and hotter. They walk by faith and not by sight. Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego speak of God's testimonies before kings. They are not put to shame.

Nebuchadnezzar is furious. The three men are thrown bound into the furnace. The king and his guards see four men in the furnace unbound. God saves his people, as he always does. The three young men come out of the furnace. The fire had no power over their bodies. They don't smell like burnt smoke, their hair and clothes unharmed. So powerful is God's saving work that when God saves his people, God completely undoes whatever had afflicted his people. Even from a fiery furnace? Saved, not even the smell of smoke persists. How much more when God saves his people from death would those bodies be completely free of any indication that they rested in the grave.

God's history of salvation is throughout the Old Testament. Isaiah sees a great feast, "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." This invitation goes out to all people. If you are the greatest, come. If you are the least, you too are welcome to this feast. If you come at the first hour, eat and drink. If you have waited until the 11th hour, do not fear to be too late, come and be filled. The splendor of this feast is for you.

Ezekiel speaks of a new heart that God gives. God sprinkles water on his people. He takes out the disobedient dead heart, and puts in a new heart. God gives his people the heart to follow his law and to delight to serve the creator in willing obedience, so that love and good works would abound. Zechariah speaks of God who is the mighty one who saves his people and

delivers them from suffering reproach and deals with their oppressors on behalf of his people.

God always works to save his people from their adversaries and saves them for life with him in the new creation. So when the sabbath was past, very early on the first day of the week, the sun dawns on the day of the new creation. The women go to the tomb - Mary Magdalene, Mary, Salome. The women go with wondering. "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" Even that question, God had an answer for that question. The stone is rolled away. The angel proclaims the good news, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him."

God's history of salvation points to this very moment. Creation would be rescued from death as the creator hands his body over to death and rises from the dead. Noah is delivered from a wicked and perverse generation that drinks the cup of God's wrath, while Noah is safe in the ark. Job sees that his Redeemer lives, this Redeemer, this Jesus, this crucified one, dead, and now raised to life. The three men emerge unscathed by fire as they behold this Son of God, who goes through the fire with them, so that they live. The entire Old Testament points to this resurrection as the work that God does to save his people.

Even Jesus himself pointed out that this resurrection was on its way. Jesus said to his disciples three times that the Son of Man would be handed over, killed, and on the third day rise. Resurrection is coming. Salvation is coming. Jesus also told his disciples to be ready, telling them, "But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." Death will not win. God's history of saving his people continues. God promises to save his people. God does save his people.

That history continues today, as you are brought into that history. You are made in the image of God, so God's salvation is for you. You are baptized, escaping this perverse generation in the ark of the Christian church. You, like Job, confess the resurrection of your own flesh with the words, "I look for the resurrection of the dead". You need not fear the threats from those who would force you to bow and worship anyone or anything other than the true God who saves his people. You feast at the table with God. You have been sprinkled with the waters of baptism to have a new heart. You are part of God's people, the people that God works to save.

With Jesus' resurrection, that history is not over. In a way, it's only the beginning. The new creation has dawned. Christ is the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. God saves you for eternal life with him. God has promised to save you. Christ's return is very near. The whole creation groans with you awaiting that day, for creation too will be made new. When Christ returns he will reveal yet another of God's saving works - your resurrection, and the resurrection of all flesh, and the new creation. Come quickly and save us, Lord Jesus.

*Christ is risen. He is risen indeed, Alleluia!*

+ Soli Deo Gloria +

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