

*Sermon preached by Revd Ross Fishburn
St Paul's Canterbury
Easter Vigil
Sunday 17 April 2022*

This is the time.

We stand now at the hinge point in our journey and in the Christian year. We've gone through the darkness and into the light with Jesus, and now we are ready to move on into the year, into life in Christ once more, carrying the Paschal experience with us as the central experience which shapes that ongoing life. This is the point at which it all comes together for us: the recalling and remembering of the journey of Jesus, the symbols, the liturgy and our own journey. Up till now they have been in parallel, in conversation if you like, but now they come together in a pivotal point in the rites and symbols and stories of this night. In the readings, we have already rehearsed the history of salvation from the beginning, recalling the stories of creation, of the Exodus from Egypt, and of the prophetic hope of renewal and transformation. We've read these as the prelude and preparation for the climax of the history of salvation in Christ's greater Exodus. The story of Israel and the story of Christ are read together as the one story: the one story of the action of the God who saves and redeems people for life in communion with God. In the symbols of the rite, by gathering in the dawn to kindle new light, we echo the great journey of Jesus, who was raised from the darkness of death into the light of God's life. In this way we have reminded ourselves symbolically of that great yet hidden act of God in the darkness of the tomb. We tell the story and ponder its meaning and implications. We sing its praises in Paschal terms, as the new and greater Passover, as the central event in God's dealing with humankind. ***This is the time...***; we have heard it sung, several times, in ringing tones, this great song

of triumph. **This is the time** of freedom from slavery, when God's victory over Pharaoh is present again. **This is the time** when Christ breaking the bondage of death is present again. Because these great acts of God are present again to us, **this is the time** which renews us in our life in Christ. **This is the time** in which sin is washed away, innocence is restored, hatred is cast out, peace is welcomed. This **time** is indeed powerful and blessed in bringing all these things together for us.

It all comes together here because the resurrection of Jesus is the central act of God. All God's life and love are centred in the victory he wins in raising Jesus, in freeing him from the power of death and evil and the darkness. All God's love and power is risked in this great offering of Jesus, in his journey into the darkness of death. All God's future, the peace and the healing he has for all people are tied up in this great act. And in breaking through this barrier, all is transformed.

But it is central and pivotal for another reason as well. It's not just central on the level of what God does; it's central on the human and personal level as well.

We have heard from Paul's letter to the Romans of how our baptism unites us to the death and to the resurrection of Jesus, and that in our baptismal belonging to him, we too die with him and rise with him. So as we come again to the font today, we come to the pivot point in our journey in Christ. We come to the point where God's breakthrough became **our** breakthrough, and life and hope and grace become possibilities for us, and we have access to the fountain of living water which cleans and renews and refreshes us for living in God's strength. Because of this victory of Jesus, there is a way opened up for all. Because of this breakthrough in the struggle with darkness and with all that holds humanity in bondage, there is a new possibility of freedom; and because our baptism unites us to this victory, it is a possibility for each of us and for all of us.

It all comes together today, at this time. This is the time in which we can know our redemption, our salvation, our freedom and our dignity in God's love and grace most deeply.

But what will we do with it?

You see when we proclaim ***this is the time***, it's to remind us that this offer of salvation which we have already received is also a fresh experience awaiting us NOW. It is this time in which we are invited again to take up this freedom and dignity which Christ wins for us. It is this time in which we are invited to discover darkness made light. It is ***time*** in which we are asked to renew the vows of our baptism, and to renew the Easter shape to our life.

We proclaim that we have been blessed with so great a redeemer in Christ that we must sing and shout *Christ is risen* in every language available to us. But this blessing has an implication: it's not just something we can put back on the shelf after the service tonight, or some time during the week ahead. The blessing of redemption calls us to a way of life, not just to wear a badge marked Christian! As Rowan Williams has said, salvation has a grammar as well as a name; ***its name is Jesus, its grammar is the cross and the resurrection***. This is the shape of all that is said and done in that saving name; that in our speaking and our doing we die to self and rise to a different way, an economy of gift and offering and service which is patterned on the way Jesus lived and died, on the life he offered to God and to others.

Living the risen life means living a life shaped and patterned like this: a life of gift, a life of offering of self, a life of service and love for others.

The glory and the mystery of all of this is that such a life is a life of blessing and joy, a life of true and lasting freedom.

This is the time. This is the time when our journey with Christ through the darkness and into the light reaches its climax. This is the time which brings us back to the centre of Christian

experience, and renews its shape and pattern in us. Its no accident that these two things come together in this time, because the journey of Jesus gives us the pattern and the shape for our journey, a grammar for all our speaking and serving the saving name of Jesus.

But the Easter journey doesn't end here. It continues for the great 50 days of the Easter season, when our liturgies ring with the Easter word *Alleluia*. We have 50 days devoted to absorbing the experience of this night, and the consequences of our dying and rising with Jesus. These next 50 days are the church's time for reflecting on its life in Christ, for pondering how well it lives out the risen life of Christ, for savouring the blessings and the freedom which are opened up for us by Easter Day, and what it celebrates.

This is the time, when Easter comes alive for us; but it is not the time when Easter ends. For in Christ, Easter is a journey which has no ending until we are all caught up completely in God's life and light. This night is but another beginning in that Easter process. Long may we all continue in that blessed way.