

The Rev. Seth Dietrich
April 20, 2019 - Easter Vigil

Holding the Flame

In a few minutes we're going to all witness the baptism of Holden Naleid and then after that we are going to grab noisemakers and unbury the slips of paper with the A word and we are going to turn on the lights and fire up the organ and sing and shout.

And I love this transformation, the quick, dramatic, scene change. Christ is risen! Triumphant! In the resurrection we proclaim that God breaks the back of sin and death. Yes they still have some power, but they are defeated, their power is waning, Goodness, Truth, Beauty are on the march!. We will sing this is the Feast of Victory of our God. I swear one day we will figure out how right in that cue, to have the WFB high school marching band come in.

But as much as I like all the triumphant, jubilant, boisterous resurrection joy that is to come, I also love this. Being in the candle-light. In fact, the beginning of this service, when the lone candle, the CHrist light, this unconquerable love, enters into the pitch black tomb, this feels a lot like those first few hours and days of resurrection.

The early stories of resurrection do not feel like a big celebration of victory. Unlike the birth where host of angels flood the sky in light, this story is so different. Over time, the church gains more and more confidence and the voice of the church grows more and more sure and steady. But in these early stories, the resurrection of Jesus is like a whisper, like a candle flickering in the dark.

It is a masterful story of suspense, opening in the dark, early morning hours. The women see a heavy stone rolled back, and they have no idea how this could be so. There are strange, dazzling beings who tell them he is risen, but they have no proof, so the men, the ones who pride themselves on clear, hard facts, dismiss their story as an idle tale. Even so, a few go to the tomb and this story ends with Peter grasping the empty burial clothes, bewildered. Amazed.

We never actually encounter Jesus in this story. And later when we do, Jesus is not solid, victorious, triumphant, in the resurrection appearances, Jesus continues to be like a flickering candle. In the gospel of Luke, the next episode after this story, Jesus appears to two men on the road to Emmaus and soon as they recognize him, he disappears. Later he passes through walls to offer the peace to the disciples. He comes to Thomas but says, you may not touch me.

Maybe some of us can relate to this quieter, more mysterious, less big and bold version of the living Christ. The one in whom we sing *Within our darkest night you kindle a fire that never dies away.*

I was trying to think of those times in my life in which I have held a flickering flame. We started this season talking to one another at Ash Wednesday, and I thought we might end it that way. Do you have a story of holding a flame in the dark? Maybe you were scared or excited or

U2 concert.

In a moment we will baptize Holden. In many ways it is like a second birthday. We haven't had a full immersion baptism in a while and I'm really excited. Full immersion is more like a real birth. Like he emerges out of the watery womb of the church, most likely kicking and crying, but Alive. We will not hold him upside down. But we will give him a big fat birthday candle. Hang on to this candle. And on the days when you can not, I will hold the candle for you, we will hold the candle for you.

And we will hold that light of unconquerable love for the world.