

Mystery is an essential part of life.

Mystery allows us to have a sense of wonder and amazement. Mystery makes us curious. In its best sense, mystery gives us joy and makes us grateful. Without mystery, life would be boring and, well, lifeless. We would know what to expect and I imagine we would get tired of the humdrum of life—just one thing after another with no surprises, no delight.

Of course mystery can be troubling, too. We hear it as an inadequate response when some tragedy happens to us or in the wider world. Well-meaning people say, “It’s a mystery” when they do not know what to say—after someone dies too young. Or there is a natural disaster. Or we see the repetition of bad things that just don’t make sense. Frankly, that sense of “mystery” can seem like a copout.

Mystery is at the center of our faith as followers of Jesus. In his own earthly life, Jesus’ faith was filled with mystery. He knew the ancient Hebrew stories that we heard in part this evening. Those stories that shaped Jesus and his people. Like the story of creation, when God made everything from nothing—just by saying the word.

And the story of the deliverance of God’s people from a powerful and wicked empire: God parting the sea so the people could escape and then letting the sea fall back on the army of their oppressor. Such a memorable event that the women responded with singing and dancing and tambourines and the people of God continue to sing their song to this day.

And the prediction of the dry bones of God’s people coming together in a remarkable way-- joint to joint, ligament to ligament, and then brought to life by the breath of God. The prophet saw the vision of the dry bones and could not understand what it all meant. But he knew that it pointed to something beyond his day to day reality that was supremely important.

These mysterious stories haunt our faith. They inform what we believe about God and about life. Did they all happen the way they are recorded in the Bible? We don’t know—it’s a mystery. But we do know and we do believe that these stories point to something that we need to see—that God is involved in our world, that God cares, and that we can trust God to save us in the story of the biggest mystery of all—God joining us and becoming human to save us.

For on this holy night, The Great Vigil of Easter, we remember God’s ultimate mystery. Some may question this mystery-- how God could become human in this little baby, Jesus? How could God-made-human in Jesus suffer and die? God can’t do that! And how then was that same divine-human person raised from the dead in some mysterious way?

There is nothing wrong with asking these question or even with having doubts about the answers. They are not new questions or original doubts. People, even those closest to

Jesus, had them from the very beginning of our faith. But on the other side of the mystery, beyond our questions and frankly our ability to know, there is the truth that abides in mystery.

The test for the truth of this mystery is what it produces in our hearts when we believe; and how it transforms how we live our lives and shapes the contours of our common life. IN other words, does they mystery give us hope? This deepest mystery of God becoming human in Jesus created three major shifts in human life that we can observe and touch and feel. These three shifts continue to shape what it means to be human even to this day; they do give hope:

1. **The dignity of being human.** If God could become one of us, then being “one of us” must be good. That is not always easy to believe. Some humans can be messed up. Sometimes each of us do some pretty bad things—we fall short of that dignity that Jesus confirmed in the human race. But then we see what we can be—not only in super saints like St. Francis and Mother Teresa, but in the everyday saints that we take time to notice. I bet everyone in this room knows at least one or two people that stand out as examples of what humans can be because we are made in God’s image and because God became one of us. The dignity of being human is an amazing mystery of grace.
2. **Forgiveness.** When we fall short—or people we know fall short—there is a way out. That was a central purpose of the mystery of God becoming one of us. Jesus endured the worst that humans can do—and still forgave us. Jesus let us know that God forgives us because God loves us. This is such a profound mystery that overcomes the common sense, non-mystery way of living—you know, holding grudges and getting even and so forth. There is another way based on the mystery of God’s grace revealed in God-made-human. Jesus showed us that way and taught us that we can learn to forgive, too.
3. **Power.** This Easter we remember again that the story of Jesus did not end on the cross or in the tomb. He endured all that he did, trusting in God’s power to bring him to life again-- but in a new form. Jesus trusted that his resurrection would be the first step of a mighty parade that would include all of us, living and dead, as we become part of God’s renewed people. We will share in his power—the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead now dwells in us, too. Not power like the world offers—bombs and guns and other forms of violence to make people conform to our will. No. But a power like God’s—a power that blesses others and enables them to flourish in God’s peaceable kingdom.

This deep mystery is what we remember and celebrate on this holy night. And as we turn to baptize Rindey in just a few minutes, we will be incorporating her into this great mystery, too. We will proclaim her human dignity as a child of God. We will proclaim that she is forgiven and that she has access to the mystery of God’s grace to live in forgiveness for the rest of her life. And we will proclaim that she has God’s Spirit living in her heart so that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead abides now in her, too. What a great and marvelous mystery we all participate in until the day of Christ Jesus.

Let us pray:

*“Heavenly Father, we thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit you have bestowed on us your servants the forgiveness of sin and have raised us to the new life of grace. Strengthen us, O Lord, with your presence, enfold us in the arms of your mercy, and keep us safe forever.”*