

Vigil of Easter
Sermon texts: Genesis 22:1-18
Ezekiel 37:1-14
Daniel 3:1-29
John 20:1-18
April 3, 2010

It is a day of Deliverance. Throughout the world on this night that includes the wee hours of the morning all of Christianity is celebrating God's deliverance.

Each of the readings speaks of God's deliverance. You've heard them wondrously told by our second year confirmands.

Isaac, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, all those unnamed ones whose bones came together and for whom God breathed into them new life, were delivered. In each circumstance these were delivered from death. Yet on each occasion their deliverance points beyond themselves.

Their deliverance points to God's deliverance of all his children through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. But consider that these are NOT just stories of what God has done long ago.

Likewise we too experience moments of deliverance in our own lives. For many of us that deliverance first comes at our baptism. As we teach and as it is expressed in the opening address for each baptism,

“By water and the Word God delivers us from sin and death and raises us to new life in Jesus Christ.”

We are delivered from the sin inherited by all humanity through the ages starting with the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. In the life to come we will be completely delivered from our daily struggle to resist sin and the forces of evil.

But how is it that we might experience the power of God to deliver us today?

This summer it will have been five years since I injured my knee. Those of you with a basic medical background or have some familiarity with sports know the serious nature of tearing the anterior cruciate ligament in knee. That is an injury that generally takes a year before your knee is back to the condition it was in before the injury, and that is for athletes.

At the time I was seventy pounds overweight. I was not happy at the prospect of surgery and physical therapy, and even less enthused about just living with it and taking the risk that at some point in the future the knee would completely blow out.

While the end result is that my knee is a hundred percent and I'm fifty five pounds lighter, the road of deliverance does not mean that there is no struggle in this life. What it does mean is that God is with us, delivering us through the hardships of life.

God delivers the despairing ones like Mary, turning tears of sorrow to tears of joy. God delivers the glutton and the users of drugs. God delivers those longing for healing of body, mind and soul. God delivers those from a life of crime to the teenagers, often girls, who are forced into a life of prostitution.

The reality of God delivering us from the forces of evil, the devil and all his empty promises is a present reality in the world we live in today. In this way, we experience the resurrection now.

As we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord, we celebrate not just our future and the promise of eternal life through Christ. We also celebrate Christ delivering us from the struggles against sin, death and the forces of evil we experience on a daily basis.

In this way we experience the answer to the petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Deliver us from evil."

For by asking God to do this we pray (as Martin Luther wrote in the Small Catechism) that he may deliver us from all kinds of evil—affecting body or soul, property or reputation—and at last, when our final hour comes, may grant us a blessed end and take us by grace from this valley of tears to himself in heaven.” AMEN.