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The Great Vigil of Easter  
Grace, River Forest  
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*Resurrection Recognition*

In the days following Christmas, it was the wisdom of one of my nephews that called us outside to marvel at the darkness. We were in Saskatoon, the largest city in Saskatchewan. Out in the prairies we were a long way from Oak Park/River Forest. Everything is so spread out. There is so much space. The light pollution was minimal. Following his lead we went out and began gazing at the stars. A gift that we could have only experienced at night, in a place without so much artificial illumination. A gift we could have only received if we had the courage to follow a child into the night.

Things are spread out here. There is so much space. It is roomy under the cover of this shadowy darkness. Tomorrow, once the sun has fully come up, there will be plenty of brass, timpani, and Easter revlry to be had. The thunderous shouts that announce the resurrection will abound. Bright pastels will create a morning mosaic that leaves no doubt that the tomb is empty. There is a gift to be received on that day. It is just that we are not there yet.

We are met with Mary who is weeping. An invitation of sorts, that whatever this night holds for you, it all belongs. Nothing needs to be crowded out. It's like she is pushing aside some of the clutter of our own hearts. Here- with Mary- your own weeping, laments, exhaustion, pain, loss, confusion, questions, doubts, shock will not be drowned out. Perhaps you have spent many a night searching for answers only to be left wanting and then by morning you just feel more isolated, judged, pushed to the side as the world goes on. Night seems to be when all of our regrets, missed opportunities, and failures recapitulate themselves before us.

It is here in the late hours of the day that something else comes into focus if we have been paying attention. As Pastor Ben Stewart writes "Tonight we speak of a God who acts in the world's nighttime. Under the cover of darkness, slaves cross rivers into freedom; dry bones rise up to live; the fiery furnace of the tyrant Nebuchadnezzar goes dark; and long before any human eyes have opened, a blue-green world is given light and a sheltering dome of air, while the land, sea and sky are filled with fruitful creatures of every shape and kind. From the beginning, God has called new life out of darkness, often against great odds."

Just a few minutes ago, we witnessed another one of God's mighty acts with our own eyes. Elise, Lucas, and Nia were baptized. Sealed with the Holy Spirit. Marked with the cross of Christ forever. They have been found. Forgiven. Died the only death they ever need to be afraid of, right in front of us. What did you notice as the water was poured on their heads, the light placed

in their hands lit from this pillar of fire, as they were clothed in Jesus Christ, and welcomed as members of his body?

Poet Jan Richardson writes, "While it was still dark." John's Gospel tells us that when Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb and finds it empty, the day has not yet begun. I cannot tell you how much I depend on that beautiful detail. Easter starts in the shadows.

When I asked Lucas what images when he thought of baptism, he said, "becoming God's friend."

In that moment of recognition, through the fog of tear stained eyes, squinting as we do trying to decipher who is just in front of us, when the risen Christ speaks her name it is as if the friend who knows her better than she knows herself had found her again in the moment she felt most abandoned and lost.

This friend is the one who calls each of us by name. Knows you completely and loves you unconditionally. And will always find you.

Jesus Christ has risen from the dead.

Friend of God- Nothing will ever be able to separate you from the love of God. Not even death.

The passion in John begins and ends in a garden. Tonight, we are in another garden. And Mary- at first glance thinks her friend is the gardener.

The phrase originated with a Greek poet, but has become the rallying cry of oppressed people around the world and even here in the US. Maybe you have heard it, "they tried to bury us; they didn't know that we were seeds."

How has the world attempted to bury you with its death-dealing pronouncements of finality. Christ is risen- may your body be a place that testifies to resurrection.

May we follow Lucas, Elise and Nina as we go into the night. May we go to all those people and places that the world has attempted to bury and find Christ nourishing new life under all the crooked signs of the opposite. Foolish enough to proclaim Christ is risen. Even where the powers of this world have turned the lights out. Gardens in the midst of the ruins. Follow the little ones of this world into the dark.

Gifts abound. Christ has gone on ahead of you.

