

The Great Vigil of Easter 2009  
Genesis 1:1-2:4a  
Exodus 14:10-31; 15:20-21  
Ezekiel 37:1-14  
Romans 6:3-11  
MARK 16:1-8

## A WILD RIDE WITH GOD

“Creation ! Liberation! Resurrection from the dead! Miracles? Or just God doing God’s thing – and inviting us to come along for a glorious, wild ride?

Or – we could stay home and rely on all of the geniuses who run *human* organizations to make creation out of chaos, to liberate the poor and the oppressed, to lift up those who are scared and depressed, and to raise us to new life once we are dead.

Does anyone else feel like some human organizations, especially lately, are actually better at making chaos out of creation, making more people become poor and oppressed, and depressing and scaring those who used to be lifted up? Thank God those who have already gone to heaven are out of reach of Congress and certain international financial institutions, which cannot undo some of what God has done!

Anybody want to go for a wild ride with God instead?

The Book of Genesis isn’t really interested in “The Big Bang” itself or what preceded it, speculations which fascinate cosmologists, physicists and theologians. Hebrew is a very “down to earth” language not easily used for abstract speculation. Genesis 1 picks up the story of Creation where there is already a mass of random molecules and atoms which aren’t anything *specific* yet. “**Then God said** let there be...” – and random atoms and molecules became definite things, then creatures, then people, over whatever period of time God chose. (God’s “workdays” are a lot longer than many of ours are.)

God spoke, and atoms and molecules became Creation: a universe with meaning, purpose – and a destiny. And a universe in which God continues to be active and involved: *creation continues*. Every time a baby is born, an egg hatches – heck, every time a healthy cell replicates, creation continues. If you can’t see the dynamic and ongoing awesomeness of Creation with your naked eyes, get a microscope or a telescope: there are amazing, untold wonders.

And we still know only a fraction of it all. Why, just 100 years ago scientists thought that our Milky Way galaxy *was* the universe, and now we know it’s far, far vaster and more amazing. Now we also know that we literally *cannot* know what’s going on *now* – it’s too vast. Stars, quasars and pulsars disclose their locations to us not from where they *are* but from where they *were* when light or other energy left them, minutes ago (as in the case of the sun) or in some cases billions of years ago.

Where are those objects *now* which *were* billions of light years away from us, and what are they doing? *God only knows*. A bit humbling, isn't it? Humility is good. Moving from knowledge to wisdom requires humility; there is so much we don't know, and some which we *can't* know.

We *do* know that no person looking at the frothing glob of hot random atoms and molecules after the Big Bang billions of years ago would have been able to predict **Creation** without having actually experienced it. From a frothing glob of hot random atoms and molecules to a woodpecker, a lily, Angkor Wat, Macchu Pichu, Michaelangelo's "Pieta", to you, to me? Heck, we humans have a hard time making an accurate five day weather forecast.

**God had a plan.** And, thank God, God's plan is still unfolding. Stay tuned. No way could we have done all this ourselves, but *we can help* if we listen to who's in charge.

**Exodus** – who could have predicted *that*? The Israelites were one of a number of small, culturally, politically and militarily insignificant peoples who were "meals" -- appetizers, really - for the empires of antiquity. And in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century B.C., the Egyptian Empire was the greatest empire in the world: culturally, politically, and militarily. The Hebrews were slaves.

The powerful always win – don't they? (That's what the powerful want everyone to believe.) The "winners" always write history – don't they? Empires always strike back, small languages, small cultures, homeless people with no cities, no armies and few people who can even read and write always get swallowed whole by dominant cultures – don't they?

So how come billions more people know who Moses was than know who the Pharaoh was from whom Moses and any Israelite willing to take a wild ride with God escaped?

Maybe slaves *can* become free, the homeless *can* have homes, the oppressed *can* experience liberation: the longest of "long shots" came in – with God's help. That's what our second reading tonight is all about. And maybe God wants today's slaves to be free, today's homeless to have homes, today's illiterate to read and write and develop their own cultures, today's oppressed to experience liberation. We cannot do this ourselves, *but we can help*, if we listen to God.

"Dry bones, dry bones, dem dry bones...Oh, hear the word of the Lord!" It's notable that the most memorable song about tonight's passage from Ezekiel is an African-American spiritual, written and first sung by people who knew that sometimes *survival* is a miracle. To be raised from the dead? Well, that wouldn't happen because you made smart, recession-proof investments, or had a tenured job in a secure line of work, or because you were an ex-CEO with a "golden parachute" – no, resurrection is all about **God** and God's action.

Maybe this year, 2009, we Americans and all citizens of the world have finally realized that *we cannot save ourselves*. When *we* try to create something out of nothing, we get...nothing. "Derivatives", aren't they called? When *we* human beings on our own try to make Creation out of chaos, we get...chaos. Credit default swaps, anyone? When *we* try to get

the homeless into homes without spiritual guidance or help for the program (the way Habitat has, for example), we get...subprime mortgages. When *we* try to liberate ourselves and others from violence using only weapons, we get...more violence. (Our leaders have recently realized it's time to try the approach of Three Cups of Tea and build schools.) When we human beings try to give meaning to peoples' lives using only materialism, we get...valleys of dry bones stretching from Detroit to China and around the world back to Detroit.

Whereas God made Creation out of chaos (and before that out of nothing), liberated the Israelites at the Red Sea, gave Ezekiel a radical vision of hope, and turned the cross, an instrument of torture and death into a symbol of hope for eternal life.

Hmm. Maybe it's time for us to hop on for a wild ride with God – and invite others to join us. But we have to remember that *we can help but we can't be in charge*. And we have to *bury* our old ways of thinking, in fact let them *die* in order that we may be raised by God to new life, here and now, and forever. That's what Paul says in tonight's Epistle.

If we really understand how profound Easter is, we may, like those women at the empty tomb so long ago, be filled at first with terror and amazement. This was *not* the ride they had expected. Easter morning was *not* Part Two of Jesus' funeral. This was an unexpected, scary, amazing, wild ride with God. And yes, they did finally tell people. That is found we found out that Christ is risen from the dead.

Let's get on board. Creation, liberation, resurrection? New life in all kinds of amazing, wonderful ways? Now *this* is a *real* stimulus plan! Let's invite others to join us, too. God knows what will happen next. And that's the best part.

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