

TUNNEL OR TOMB?

A sermon at the Easter Vigil
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St. James's Episcopal Church
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On the Internet a few weeks ago I saw a photograph of a man holding up a handwritten sign that said “due to budget cuts, the light at the end of the tunnel has been turned off.”

And I have been thinking about that ever since, because oddly that is a good metaphor for the profound challenge we face on this most ancient and holy of nights. We are in a tunnel, and we all wonder: is there really a light at the end?

Let us remember where we started. Just last week, we celebrated the arrival of Jesus in Jerusalem, an event that stirred up enormous energy as the man about whom everyone had heard so much arrived in person in the religious and political center of the region. No one knew what was going to happen. Many felt a surge of hope that this strange person might somehow emerge as a new leader, perhaps **the** new leader, the Messiah, the one who would strip the swords from the Roman soldiers, strip the privilege from the wealthy, strip the hard-heartedness from the religious authorities at the top and from everyone else.

But their hopes detonated into disaster. The man from Nazareth who could cure madness, heal the blind, walk on water, and raise the dead, was suddenly seized by soldiers like a common criminal, dragged before heartless military and religious bureaucrats, and condemned to death – for no real reason at all.

And then, with shocking swiftness, in a matter of a few hours, before anyone could think or do anything, they killed him. Brutally. Publicly. He wasn't beheaded in the basement of a prison like John the Baptist, he was nailed to a cross mounted on a hill as high as possible to force everyone to witness and accept his suffering, humiliation, rejection, and failure. This was designed to be a lesson and a warning to all. If you defy power, your destiny is the tomb.

When Jesus died, every bit of hope and joy that he had brought forth in people's hearts was extinguished. The light at the end of their tunnel went out.

And tonight, we must let our hearts take in the full terror of what that must have been like.

I know that every person here has, at some time, been touched by such misery, perhaps in a loud moment of crisis or a silent chamber of desolation and emptiness. We have all felt the prison of sin, fear, despair, brokenness, bondage, suffering, and hopelessness.

So from Good Friday until this very moment, we have relived what it is like to be lost in the tomb for which there seemed no escape and no future. Fear hovers above us, and around us, inviting us to give in.

In this hard time between Good Friday, we ask ourselves: Are we simply trapped, as humans, on a treadmill to the tomb? Are we on a road that will simply stop? Are we on a river that will plummet over the falls? Are we following a tunnel to which there is no end, in which the light simply goes out?

A tunnel without light is a frightening place. You have no knowledge of what lies ahead, where it leads, whether there are holes or steps or obstacles or dangers. You touch the walls and they are hard, cold, wet, and unforgiving.

But as humanity has travelled through the centuries, and in our own time as we have travelled through the church year, we have been offered candles to illuminate the path in front of us. These candles are the promises that God has made throughout history to the people of Israel and to all of humanity.

Why did the church, over many generations, pick these readings to be read during the Easter vigil? Because every one of the readings tonight is a promise and candle. We are supposed to hold on to them, to use them to see each other's faces, to move forward with them, and to signify that there would be light ahead.

In Genesis, we hear about God willing the world into existence, rolling back the void and bringing earth, wind, water, sky, plants, fish, animals, and people into being in a wild and exuberant act of creation. The world is his testimony that our final destiny is not the tomb. The deliverance of Noah, and of Isaac, and of the Hebrew people through the Red Sea are candles, are all promises us that our final destiny is not the tomb. The

vision of Ezekiel, who saw his world torn to pieces and his people carried into bondage by a cruel empire, was a candle that testified, our final destiny is not the tomb.

We forget just how ancient these promises these are. We can be engulfed by our doubts and our fears, so much so that that those candles of promise seem to flicker and go out. We become understandably and easily frightened by how dark some of our passages can be.

When I was in Israel last year, our group decided to walk through the famous tunnel of Hezekiah. King Hezekiah lived 2,700 years ago in the ancient heart of Jerusalem, which at the time was a fortified settlement perched on a massive hill surrounded by deep valleys. Despite its walls, the city had one severe problem – the water supply at the Gihon Spring was not up with them, but down below in the valley. When Hezekiah realized that he was going to be attacked by the armies of the Assyrian emperor, who would cut off that water, he ordered his men to dig a tunnel that connect the Gihon Spring to the Pool of Siloam, which was within the city walls.

This was a huge task – the tunnel was more than 1,500 feet long, through solid rock, and it had to be excavated in a way so that the pool was lower than the spring, because the water would flow from one to the other. Incredibly, it was built by two teams who started at opposite ends and who were guided, we think, by people hammering on through the rock above, signaling where to go. After months of digging, they actually managed to meet in the middle.

I traveled with a great assemblage of people, led by the dean of Yale Divinity School, Harry Attridge, and his wife Jan. We were all Christians, from many denominations, walks of life, older and younger, clergy and lay, experienced and new to the Holy Land. We were encouraged by the signs at the beginning of the tunnel urging us to move forward. There was a sign that said that there were some stairs, and we should be careful, but we paid no mind.

But soon we realized that our trip through the tunnel had every sign of becoming a disaster. Some of us, including me, could not walk very well, and we felt increasingly nervous when we saw we would have to descend several steep spiral staircases. They were made of icy, slippery steel, curving round and round into darker and darker levels. When we reached the bottom, we started down a long dim passageway with an uneven

floor with pools of water. With every step I tried to suppress the image of me, or one of our party, slipping and breaking a leg in the gloom. Could the EMTs even get us out of such a place?

As a group, we changed. Our titles, our ages, our backgrounds didn't matter. Some of the more athletic and well-prepared members of our party swiftly came to the rescue of the fragile ones. They walked in front of us; they shined little pocket lamps at our feet; they held our arms and braced their legs and bodies against us so that our feet would not shoot out from under us. We moved slowly. We had no idea where the passage was leading. The passageway curved back and forth under the mountain. I could feel the cold sweat sliding down my back. I wondered if I would ever see that bright Middle Eastern sun again.

Finally, after great struggle, we came to a wide-open space where some workmen were cleaning up another part of the tunnel. We are here, we thought. Salvation is at hand! But, no, we went around a corner and discovered there were *more* spiral steps and we entered a *deeper* tunnel, where the floor had about an inch of water, and you had to walk single file, trying to hold hands, balancing on planks lying in long dark puddles. In some places the tunnel shrank to less than two feet across, so that you had to edge sideways to get into the next passage. We began to get spread out, and isolated from each other. Again, people offered their support; at one point, to shake off our panic, some of us started to sing.

I was genuinely scared, something that doesn't often happen to me. Somewhere in the back of our heads, we believed that we would reach the end. But this destination seemed increasingly remote. If the lights had gone off, we would have been trapped.

But looking back on it, the experience taught me something about the life of faith. We had entered the tunnel on the basis of a promise. It had turned out to be much harder than any of us expected. We made our way forward through mutual support, making sure that even the weakest member of our party, received assistance. We relied on whatever dim lights we could find or could transport. We stuck together, and we made little jokes to cheer ourselves up, and we sang hymns to raise our spirits. And we believed, despite the reality that we were moving deeper and deeper into the mountain, that we would emerge into the light at the end of tunnel.

And eventually we did. We all stumbled out into the late afternoon sunshine. We were safe, together, and free.

About two months later Yale Divinity School sent us all T-shirts that said “I survived Hezekiah’s tunnel.”

The church year allows us to locate our individual lives, and our community life, in the experience of generations and generations of believers, who have all found themselves moving more and more deeply into the darkness of their tunnels and who have only had the promises of the past to rely on. And as things get darker and colder and wetter, these promises can seem more and more remote.

The darkest and deepest tunnel that we all face, that is at the heart of our service tonight, is the tunnel of our mortality. Most people respond to this inevitable truth by hiding their heads, hearts, and minds.

But a Christians, we cannot, we must not, shy away from this truth. It is central to our humanity. It is central to our faith. And more than anything it is central to the promise that we have received. It is the core of the meaning of the Easter vigil.

Do you remember the 33 Chilean miners, trapped a half mile below the surface of desert for weeks? The world watched and waited while their rescuers drilled a vertical tunnel through solid rock in order to bring them out of what would have been their tomb.

This is what God has done in Jesus Christ. God has drilled a hole through the bedrock of death, so that each of us, joined to Christ in baptism, could be pulled out of our tombs into the sunlight.

Even though we can imagine the bleak, broken hearts of the disciples as they fled from the terrifying images of Golgotha, we know that they were and we are poised to experience the greatest act of love in the history of the universe. In God’s economy of grace, there are no budget cuts. There are no imprisonments. We are all going to survive Hezekiah’s tunnel. The light at the end was not turned off -- far from it. On this night is flooding into the world through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. As Christians, we say and sing and celebrate that death was not his final destiny and therefore – therefore – **therefore – it is not ours.** As Paul says in Romans 6

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

On this night we say and sing and celebrate that there is no sin, no fear, no despair, no brokenness, no bondage, no suffering, no prison, no tunnel, and no tomb from which we cannot in the end escape. That is the miracle of Easter, before which we must erupt in alleluias. At the beginning of creation God said “let there be light” – not as a distant fact lost in history but as a reality anchored into the rest of eternity, and – thanks be to the love of God in Christ – it is into the glory of that permanent light and life that we now know that we shall pass.

AMEN.

[Genesis 1:1-2:4a \[The Story of Creation\]](#)

Psalm 136 (sung)

[Genesis 7:1-5, 11-18, 8:6-18, 9:8-13 \[The Flood\]](#)

Psalm 46 (sung)

[Exodus 14:10-31; 15:20-21 \[Israel's deliverance at the Red Sea\]](#)

Go Down Moses

[Isaiah 55:1-11 \[Salvation offered freely to all\]](#)

Canticle 9, First Song of Isaiah (sung)

[Romans 6:3-11](#)

[Psalm 114](#)

[Luke 24:1-12](#)

The Lessons Appointed for Use on

The Great Vigil of Easter

At The Liturgy of the Word

At least two of the following Lessons are read, of which one is always the Lesson from Exodus. After each Lesson, the Psalm or Canticle listed, or some other suitable psalm, canticle, or hymn may be sung. A period of silence may be kept; and a suitable Collect, such as those on pages 288-291 of the Prayer Book, may be said.

Genesis 1:1-2:4a [The Story of Creation]

Genesis 7:1-5, 11-18, 8:6-18, 9:8-13 [The Flood]

Genesis 22:1-18 [Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac]

Exodus 14:10-31; 15:20-21 [Israel's deliverance at the Red Sea]

Isaiah 55:1-11 [Salvation offered freely to all]

Baruch 3:9-15, 3:32-4:4 or Proverbs 8:1-8, 19-21; 9:4b-6 [Learn wisdom and live]

Ezekiel 36:24-28 [A new heart and a new spirit]

Ezekiel 37:1-14 [The valley of dry bones]

Zephaniah 3:14-20 [The gathering of God's people]

At The Eucharist

Romans 6:3-11

Psalm 114

Luke 24:1-12

The Story of Creation

Genesis 1:1-2:4a

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

And God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth." And it was so. God made the two great lights--the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night--and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky." So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation. These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

Psalm 136:1-9, 23-26 Page 789, BCP

The Flood

Genesis 7:1-5, 11-18, 8:6-18, 9:8-13

The LORD said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you alone are righteous before me in this generation. Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and its mate; and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and its mate; and seven pairs of the birds of the air also, male and female, to keep their kind alive on the face of all the earth. For in seven days I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights; and every living thing that I have made I will blot out from the face of the ground." And Noah did all that the LORD had commanded him.

In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. The rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights. On the very same day Noah with his sons, Shem and Ham and Japheth, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons entered the ark, they and every wild animal of every kind, and all domestic animals of every kind, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every bird of every kind-- every bird, every winged creature. They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life. And those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him; and the LORD shut him in.

The flood continued forty days on the earth; and the waters increased, and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. The waters swelled and increased greatly on the earth; and the ark floated on the face of the waters.

At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made and sent out the raven; and it went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth. Then he sent out the dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground; but the dove found no place to set its foot, and it returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. So he put out his hand and took it and brought it into the ark with him. He waited another seven days, and again he sent out the dove from the ark; and the dove came back to him in the evening, and there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth. Then he waited another seven days, and sent out the dove; and it did not return to him any more.

In the six hundred first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and saw that the face of the ground was drying. In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry. Then God said to Noah, "Go out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you. Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh-- birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth-- so that they may abound on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth." So Noah went out with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives.

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth."

Psalm 46 Page 649, BCP

Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac

Genesis 22:1-18

After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you." So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. Then Abraham said to his young men,

"Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you." Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together.

When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place "The LORD will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided."

The angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, "By myself I have sworn, says the LORD: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice."

Psalm 16 Page 599, BCP
Israel's deliverance at the Red Sea

Exodus 14:10-31; 15:20-21

As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites looked back, and there were the Egyptians advancing on them. In great fear the Israelites cried out to the LORD. They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, 'Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness." But Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the LORD will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to keep still."

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward. But you lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the Israelites may go into the sea on dry ground. Then I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and so I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army, his chariots, and his chariot drivers. And the Egyptians shall

know that I am the LORD, when I have gained glory for myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his chariot drivers."

The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them. It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night.

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. At the morning watch the LORD in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic. He clogged their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the Israelites, for the LORD is fighting for them against Egypt."

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers." So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the LORD tossed the Egyptians into the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great work that the LORD did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the LORD and believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.

Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. And Miriam sang to them:

"Sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously;
horse and rider he has thrown into the sea."

Canticle 8, The Song of Moses Page 85, BCP

Salvation offered freely to all

Isaiah 55:1-11

Ho, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;

and you that have no money,
come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.

Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.

Incline your ear, and come to me;
listen, so that you may live.

I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.

See, I made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander for the peoples.

See, you shall call nations that you do not know,
and nations that do not know you shall run to you,

because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel,
for he has glorified you.

Seek the LORD while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near;

let the wicked forsake their way,
and the unrighteous their thoughts;

let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,

making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,

so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,

but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

Canticle 9, The First Song of Isaiah Page 86, BCP

Learn wisdom and live

Baruch 3:9-15, 3:32-4:4

Hear the commandments of life, O Israel;
give ear, and learn wisdom!
Why is it, O Israel, why is it that you are in the land of your enemies,
that you are growing old in a foreign country,
that you are defiled with the dead,
that you are counted among those in Hades?
You have forsaken the fountain of wisdom.
If you had walked in the way of God,
you would be living in peace for ever.
Learn where there is wisdom,
where there is strength,
where there is understanding,
so that you may at the same time discern
where there is length of days, and life,
where there is light for the eyes, and peace.
Who has found her place?
And who has entered her storehouses?
But the one who knows all things knows her,
he found her by his understanding.
The one who prepared the earth for all time
filled it with four-footed creatures;
the one who sends forth the light, and it goes;
he called it, and it obeyed him, trembling;
the stars shone in their watches, and were glad;
he called them, and they said, "Here we are!"
They shone with gladness for him who made them.
This is our God;
no other can be compared to him.
He found the whole way to knowledge,
and gave her to his servant Jacob

and to Israel, whom he loved.
Afterwards she appeared on earth
and lived with humankind.
She is the book of the commandments of God,
the law that endures for ever.
All who hold her fast will live,
and those who forsake her will die.
Turn, O Jacob, and take her;
walk towards the shining of her light.
Do not give your glory to another,
or your advantages to an alien people.
Happy are we, O Israel,
for we know what is pleasing to God.
or

Proverbs 8:1-8, 19-21; 9:4b-6

Does not wisdom call,
and does not understanding raise her voice?
On the heights, beside the way,
at the crossroads she takes her stand;
beside the gates in front of the town,
at the entrance of the portals she cries out:
"To you, O people, I call,
and my cry is to all that live.
O simple ones, learn prudence;
acquire intelligence, you who lack it.
Hear, for I will speak noble things,
and from my lips will come what is right;
for my mouth will utter truth;
wickedness is an abomination to my lips.
All the words of my mouth are righteous;
there is nothing twisted or crooked in them.

"My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold,
and my yield than choice silver.
I walk in the way of righteousness,
along the paths of justice,
endowing with wealth those who love me,
and filling their treasuries."

To those without sense she says,
"Come, eat of my bread
and drink of the wine I have mixed.
Lay aside immaturity, and live,
and walk in the way of insight."

Psalm 19 Page 606, BCP

A new heart and a new spirit

Ezekiel 36:24-28

Say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. Then you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

Psalms 42 and 43 Page 643-645, BCP

The valley of dry bones

Ezekiel 37:1-14

The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD."

So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will

place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act," says the LORD.

Psalm 143 Page 798, BCP

The gathering of God's people

Zephaniah 3:14-20

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion;
shout, O Israel!

Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter Jerusalem!

The LORD has taken away the judgments against you,
he has turned away your enemies.

The king of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst;
you shall fear disaster no more.

On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:

Do not fear, O Zion;
do not let your hands grow weak.

The LORD, your God, is in your midst,
a warrior who gives victory;

he will rejoice over you with gladness,
he will renew you in his love;

he will exult over you with loud singing
as on a day of festival.

I will remove disaster from you,
so that you will not bear reproach for it.

I will deal with all your oppressors
at that time.

And I will save the lame
and gather the outcast,

and I will change their shame into praise

and renown in all the earth.

At that time I will bring you home,
at the time when I gather you;

for I will make you renowned and praised
among all the peoples of the earth,

when I restore your fortunes
before your eyes, says the LORD.

Psalm 98 Page 727, BCP

At the Eucharist

Almighty God, who for our redemption gave your only- begotten Son to the death of the cross, and by his glorious resurrection delivered us from the power of our enemy: Grant us so to die daily to sin, that we may evermore live with him in the joy of his resurrection; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

. or this O God, who made this most holy night to shine with the glory of the Lord's resurrection: Stir up in your Church that Spirit of adoption which is given to us in Baptism, that we, being renewed both in body and mind, may worship you in sincerity and truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Romans 6:3-11

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Psalm 114 Page 756, BCP

Luke 24:1-12

On the first day of the week, at early dawn, the women who had come with Jesus from Galilee came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.