



making God's love visible in downtown Memphis

Salvation history
Easter Vigil
April 3, 2021
The Rev. Amber Carswell

In the beginning, there was the Word, and the Word was God. The Word of love was spoken first, and all things came into being through it.

Then came the loss.

Something broke open in the world and spread,
an ocean of broken promises cyclically feeding
tidal waves of retribution,
and it left no one on dry land.

In order to keep our own heads above water, we held others under.

We called it cleverness or prestige or survival of the fittest.

And even for those of us who could stay afloat, still every death seemed a premonition, a warning of the loss that would inevitably come.

Every body we watched silently descend to the depths reminded us of our own.

We were terrified, and we were not waving, but drowning.¹

The Word that was God came to us.

But the waters were not parted this time because miracles had not worked. This was not the superman we wanted; this was someone who reminded us of ourselves, weak, breakable. In our rage, we held the Word under, too, and the wonder was that he did not fight back.

When he descended, we knew we were right about him after all.

But this action turned out to be the key.

There was something about the struggle, the flailing, the self-preservation, the obsession with power that had to be let go. The early Christians remembered this death and named it baptism and started practicing at it as best we could. We are not very good at it.

But the Word did it perfectly. When the Word came, it was to more than the surface level of the chaos and carnage of human will. The leagues through which he descended could not be counted. He came to your death and to mine, to every broken promise and scuttled dream and he kept going, til he met the last enemy, which is death itself. Death could not hold the Word that was love. Death cannot hold Love. The valley began to fill as he rose, all of who we are brought up in his wake, all of who we are was brought into God's own self. All of who we are was raised with him.

That is why we are here tonight. The last Word has been spoken, and it is Love.

“O death, where is thy sting?”

¹ See Stevie Smith's poem "Not Waving But Drowning"

O Hell, where is thy victory?

Christ is Risen, and you, o death, have died!
Christ is Risen, and the mighty are cast down!
Christ is Risen, and the cosmos rejoices!
Christ is Risen, and life has been set free.

Christ is Risen, and the tomb is emptied of its dead;
for Christ having risen from the dead,
is become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

To Him be Glory and Power forever and ever. Amen!"²

² A paraphrase of John Chrysostom's Easter sermon, 400 AD.