

WHILE IT'S STILL DARK

EASTER VIGIL

John 20:1-18

Pastor Saul Stensvaag

First, I want to assure the youth choir members that we will finish our worship service *"while it's still dark."* But that's not the meaning of the title of the meditation this evening. If we look at the Biblical witness, including some of the texts we've heard this evening, we see that very often, the most marvelous acts of our God take place at night, while it's still dark.

- Think of the situation at the dawn of our universe, in Genesis chapter one, *"darkness covered the face of the deep."*
- Or remember how God brought the people of Israel through the waters of the Red Sea, delivering them from the hands of the Egyptians? *"The LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land."*
- And it was on a *"Silent and Holy night"* That the Son of God came to earth, and was born in a manger.

And so it is fitting that we gather here tonight in the darkness, in the middle of the night, to celebrate with awe and wonder, that greatest of all acts of salvation, the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

No one knows just what time it took place. All we know is that Mary Magdalene came to the tomb *while it was still dark*: sometime between sundown on Saturday night and sunrise on Easter morning. And when she looked, the tomb was empty.

It happened while it was still dark. And so it is today. Our risen and living Lord Jesus comes to us most often in the times when it is darkest. When our hearts are dark with despair, when we struggle with the night of self-doubt, or the darkness of guilt, or the black hole of grief and sorrow that comes with the death or serious illness of a loved one.

While it is still dark, Jesus Christ is raised from the dead.

While it is still dark, the risen Christ comes to us, bringing the light of the resurrection, which no darkness can ever overcome.

Friends, in the darkness of this night, we remember all of the shadows, all the dark corners in our lives. I know that sometimes, that darkness can threaten to totally overwhelm us.

But OUR LOVING GOD DOES SOME OF HIS BEST WORK *"WHILE IT IS STILL DARK."*

Remember:

- Out of primeval darkness, God created the universe.
- In the watches of the night, that same God parted the waters of the Red Sea so that the people of Israel could walk through to freedom.
- In the darkness of a stable, the world first heard the cries of the one who would become its saviour.

And finally, God's greatest act of all -- the miracle by which death was defeated, and the doors of heaven opened to all believers -- that act happened in the dark hours before dawn on Easter morning.

GOD DOES SOME OF HIS BEST WORK *"WHILE IT'S STILL DARK."*

That's why we're here tonight. This is the night of all nights. As the cantor sang at the beginning of our worship: *"This is the night in which all who believe in Christ are rescued from evil and the gloom of sin. This is the night in which, breaking the chains of death, Christ arises from hell in triumph.*

And tonight the RISEN SAVIOR COMES TO US, AND INVITES US TO HIS TABLE. Tonight, the risen Christ brings the light of eternal life into our lives, and drives out whatever darkness threatens to enslave us.

Tonight, while it's still dark, the words of the hymn we'll sing later truly become reality: *'Lo, Jesus meets thee, risen from the tomb! Lovingly he greets thee, scatters fear and gloom. Let his church with gladness hymns of triumph sing; for the Lord now liveth. Death hath lost its sting!*

May these words come true for each one of us this night, while it's still dark.

And may we bear THE LIGHT OF EASTER -- the LIGHT OF THE RISEN CHRIST -- into all the world. AMEN