



Sermon for The Great Vigil of Easter  
Rev. Jonathan Stepp  
April 20, 2019  
Matthew 28:1-10

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This Great Vigil of Easter is one of the most ancient services of Christianity. Traditionally it is observed at any time between sundown on Holy Saturday and sunrise on Easter morning and it marks the beginning of the 50 days of Easter when we celebrate the resurrection of Christ.

In the Eastern Orthodox Churches – such as Greek Orthodox and Russian Orthodox – it often takes place just before dawn and one of the ancient traditions of the Eastern churches is to read at this service the Easter sermon of St. John Chrysostom. If you have attended Morning or Evening Prayer during Lent you should recognize that name: there is a prayer attributed to him that we read at those daily offices.

Chrysostom was considered the greatest preacher of his age – he lived from the late 300s into the early 400s – and, in fact, his name “Chrysostom” means “the man with the golden mouth” in Greek. Or as we might say in English, “the man with the silver tongue.”

In this sermon Chrysostom references two parables of Jesus. One is the parables of the workers, where Jesus tells about a generous land owner who paid all his workers the same wage: the guy who got there at 8:00 p.m. got the same wage as the guy who went to work at 6:00 a.m. The parable teaches us that God’s grace in Christ’s resurrection is for all people everywhere, not just the luck few. And the other parable is references is one we have come to know well: the parable of the prodigal son, in which God’s gracious love for everyone in Christ is pictured by the father killing the fatted calf to celebrate the return of his long-lost son.

Here then, is the Easter sermon of St. John Chrysostom:

Are there any who are devout lovers of God?

Let them enjoy this beautiful bright festival!

Are there any who are grateful servants?

Let them rejoice and enter into the joy of their Lord!

Are there any weary with fasting?

Let them now receive their wages!

If any have toiled from 6:00 in the morning,

let them receive their due reward;

If any have come after 9:00,

let him with gratitude join in the Feast!

And he that arrived after the noon hour,

let him not doubt; for he too shall sustain no loss.

And if any delayed until the 3:00 in the afternoon,

let him not hesitate; but let him come too.

And he who arrived only at the 6:00 in the evening,

let him not be afraid by reason of his delay.

For the Lord is gracious and receives the last even as the first.

He gives rest to him that comes at the end of the day,

as well as to him that toiled from the first.

To this one He gives, and upon another He bestows.

He accepts the works as He greets the endeavor.

The deed He honors and the intention He commends.

Let us all enter into the joy of the Lord!

First and last alike receive your reward;  
rich and poor, rejoice together!  
Sober and slothful, celebrate the day!  
You that have kept the fast, and you that have not,  
rejoice today for the Table is richly laden!  
Feast royally on it, the calf is a fatted one.  
Let no one go away hungry. Partake, all, of the cup of faith.  
Enjoy all the riches of His goodness!

Let no one grieve at his poverty,  
for the universal kingdom has been revealed.  
Let no one mourn that he has fallen again and again;  
for forgiveness has risen from the grave.  
Let no one fear death, for the Death of our Savior has set us free.  
He has destroyed it by enduring it.

He destroyed Hell when He descended into it.  
He put it into an uproar even as it tasted of His flesh.  
Isaiah foretold this when he said,  
"You, O Hell, have been troubled by encountering Him below."  
Hell was in an uproar because it was done away with.  
It was in an uproar because it is mocked.  
It was in an uproar, for it is destroyed.  
It is in an uproar, for it is annihilated.  
It is in an uproar, for it is now made captive.

Hell took hold of a body, and discovered it had taken hold of God.

It took hold of earth, and discovered it had taken hold of Heaven.

It took hold of what it saw, and was conquered by what it did not see.

O death, where is your sting?

O Hell, where is your victory?

Christ is Risen, and you, o death, are annihilated!

Christ is Risen, and the evil ones are cast down!

Christ is Risen, and the angels rejoice!

Christ is Risen, and life is liberated!

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!