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St. John's Episcopal Church
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Easter Vigil

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

This is the night, my friends. The pyromaniac's dream out there in the garden, the light of Christ leading us along the way.

This is the night when we hear our salvation history – the Creation, the Flood, the Parting of the Red Sea, all those wonderful campfire stories about God's love for all humankind that precede the bursting forth of the Gospel proclamation: He is risen!

God has found us. God has found those of us who have been too sleepy to notice, those of us who have been too busy to notice, those of us who from time to time simply haven't cared enough to notice: God has found us again.

The resurrection is meant to get our attention. The resurrection is God's love out *loud*.

God wakes us up, shakes the world, and says, "*Pay attention! I have begun a new thing!* Behold! I make *all* things new!"

Ah, yes... Arguably, the pivotal moment of the Church year, the moment everything leads up to. Stories of birth in a smelly barn, miracles with bread and wine, healing the blind, feeding the hungry, curing the sick, raising the dead.

None of it has any meaning without this exclamation point – that Jesus Christ, hung from a cross until dead, has vanquished death, absolved our sins, and risen to new life with God.

And all this has deep theological meaning, which scholars, clergy, laypeople, theologians have wrestled with for centuries.

But what does it mean for us? It's more than a big festival Eucharist, grand music, water, wine, and bread, isn't it?

I'm thinking...

David Sedaris, in his book "*Me Talk Pretty One Day*," writes of an English class, where non-English speaking students were trying to explain Easter... "Faced with the challenge of explaining the cornerstone of Christianity, we did what any self-respecting group of people might do. We talked about food instead. "'Easter is a party to eat of the lamb,' one Italian explained. 'One may too eat of the chocolate.'"

Now that's something I can relate to.

Part of what makes the Resurrection so hard to talk about is that it is beyond our experience. We don't see people leaving their graves or their tombs unless we watch "*Walking Dead*."

Even the Gospel writers didn't tell us about that exact moment when Jesus sat up, took off his shrouds, and left. They only tell us after the fact – the empty tomb.

But we do often experience Resurrection – new life – in our world.

I've experienced Resurrection in my own life. I remember the dark, dark places my mind frequented when under the influence of drugs and alcohol. I remember loving people lifting me up, helping me carry my cross of self-defeat, but most of all I remember walking into St. John's Episcopal Church in San Francisco and being struck by the realization that I was home. And I began my resurrected life.

I've seen resurrection here in Mt. Pleasant. A woman leaves her abusive husband with her four children and seeks shelter with us. We listen to her story. We find her a house she can afford to rent. Her children enroll in schools, she finds work, and her life, which seemed hopeless, is now full of hope. She no longer lives in fear.. She can dream again. For herself, for her children. Resurrection life.

I've seen resurrection here at St. John's. College students who've done what any self-respecting college student does, they've drifted away from the Church. But a choral scholar was so moved by this community, so unreservedly loved, that he searched for confirmation. Another yearned for baptism. A young man struggling through the transition from his former life as female. Some were hungry – and now, well-fed, they are feeding others.

Resurrection is deeply personal and profoundly public. And to know resurrection we first must die.

We must die to a life clinging to physical stuff – to our desperate longing for more and more stuff. We must die to our addictions – to shopping, to drugs and alcohol, to ego-fulfillment, to busy-ness, to the drug of *more*. We must die to our great desire to feel good at the expense of doing good and the confusion we have over immediate happiness and true joy.

And that's not easy.

Death and resurrection can feel like birth. Messy, hard work, pain. It's not easy to let go, to die, but the resurrection experience is like a new morning. Sun, warmth, color, light. Resurrection invites us, beckons us toward a different way of living, and it's not easy. First we have to say "Yes." Christ is alive!

Christ is alive, resurrected, among the oppressed and the oppressors, in the victims and in the survivors, among those who suffer and those who have been released.

Christ is alive among those who live in fear and among those who live in hope.

Jesus Christ lives in the streets and in the board rooms, in the slum and in the church, among those who cry for justice and those who fight for justice and those who provide justice. And Jesus Christ lives in you and in me. We are a people of the Resurrection. We let go. We are reborn. Over and over and over again.

God's response to our broken world is to send his love. His compassion, his forgiveness, his mercy. The incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ is the incarnation of divine love – a crystal chalice in which all human history, all human brokenness, all human goodness can be

held in the fullness of God's love. The incarnation of God happens in the unnoticed acts of love that beckon to us, call us, to be better than we thought we could be.

Yes, the man Jesus died. He died a bloody, violent death on a cross two thousand years ago.

But Christ is alive. Christ isn't just risen from the dead, *Christ is alive!*

The Resurrection of Christ is a message to us all: You are loved. Your sins are forgiven. Now: Go, love one another as I have loved you.

And we will be a resurrected people, living a resurrected life.

And then repeat after me:

Alleluia!