

Great Vigil of Easter  
April 15, 2017 (Easter Eve)  
The Rev. Jedediah D. Holdorph  
Trinity Episcopal Church

Readings from the Hebrew Scriptures

Romans 6:3-11  
Matthew 28:1-10

John Chrysostom was Bishop of Constantinople in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century. His Christian name was John. He was later called "Chrysostom," which translates as "golden-mouthed," because of the sweetness of his eloquence. The eloquence and poetry of his Easter sermon illustrates the point.

In many Eastern Rite Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, the Easter Homily of St. John Chrysostom is read as part of their service for Easter Day. Somewhat differently, it's become fairly common – or at least not exceptional – in many Roman Catholic and Episcopal churches to include this sermon as part of the Great Vigil of Easter.

I told you all of this last year before I went on to read the ancient sermon to you then. And if you were here at this service then, you might recall that I mentioned I might read it again.

Just a couple of comments before I do. As you take it in, you might notice a distinctive point of emphasis. John Chrysostom doesn't speak of Jesus dying on the cross to take away our sins. He speaks, instead, of God in Christ being victorious over the powers of evil and of death.

And as I understand it, this sermon isn't just "preached" to passive pew-sitters; it's performed. Considerable "audience participation" is expected. In some places, the congregation remains standing, and every time the word "dead" or "death" is said, the people stomp their feet, just like Jesus stomped on Hell. And whenever the preacher announces that Hell was "in an uproar," the congregation says the line along with the preacher or repeats the refrain, "in an uproar." And when the preacher declares that "Christ is risen," the people rejoice, again either joining the preacher or repeating the words right after: "Christ is risen." So that's what we're going to do tonight: stomp when I say dead or death and repeat the refrains, saying after me either "in an uproar" or "Christ is risen," at the appropriate times. <sup>i</sup>



Are there any who are devout lovers of God?  
Let them enjoy this beautiful *and radiant* 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 the first hour,  
let them receive their due reward;  
If any have come after the third hour,  
let *them* with gratitude join in the Feast!  
*If any have* arrived after the sixth hour,  
let *them* not doubt; for *they* too shall sustain no loss.  
And if any *have* delayed until the ninth hour,  
let *them* not hesitate; but let *them* come too.  
And *if any* arrived only at the eleventh hour,  
let *them* not be afraid *on account of tardiness*.  
For the Lord is gracious and receives the last even as the first.  
He gives rest to *the one who* comes at the eleventh hour,  
as well as to *the one who* 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;  
*O rich and poor, one with another, dance with joy!*  
*O you ascetics and you negligent, celebrate the day!*  
You that have kept the fast, and you that have *disregarded the fast*,  
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 God's goodness!

Let no one grieve at *their* poverty,  
for the universal kingdom has been revealed.

Let no one mourn that *they have* 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 ... ["was in an uproar!"]  
    because it was done away with.  
It was in an uproar ... ["was in an uproar!"]  
    because it is mocked.  
It was in an uproar uproar ... ["was in an uproar!"]  
    *because it was destroyed.*  
It was in an uproar uproar ... ["was in an uproar!"]  
    *because it was annihilated.*  
It was in an uproar uproar ... ["was in an uproar!"]  
    *because it was bound in chains.*

Hell took a body, and discovered God.  
It took earth, and encountered Heaven.  
It took what it saw, and was overcome by what it did not see.

O death, where is thy sting?  
O Hell, where is thy victory?

Christ is Risen ... ["Christ is risen!"]  
    and you, o death, are annihilated!  
Christ is Risen ... ["Christ is risen!"]  
    and the evil ones are cast down!  
Christ is Risen ... ["Christ is risen!"]  
    and the angels rejoice!  
Christ is Risen ... ["Christ is risen!"]  
    and life is liberated!

Christ is Risen ... ["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!<sup>ii</sup>

---

<sup>i</sup> "Paschal Sermon of St. John Chrysostom: A 4th-century sermon still preached every Easter in Orthodox churches," Faith Alive Christian resources @ <http://www.reformedworship.org/article/december-1999/paschal-sermon-st-john-chrysostom-4th-century-sermon-still-preached-every-east> "Paschal Homily," in Wikipedia @ [http://orthodoxwiki.org/Paschal\\_Homily](http://orthodoxwiki.org/Paschal_Homily).

Additional information from Jane Voigts @ <http://janevoigts.com/blog/2014/4/23/s88o7il4hoa5sq6pn5g7nuq98bnpxg>.

<sup>ii</sup> This translation from "Anglicans Online" @ [http://anglicansonline.org/special/Easter/chrysostom\\_easter.html](http://anglicansonline.org/special/Easter/chrysostom_easter.html).

I altered the language: 1) for inclusivity with respect to humanity and 2) for consistency or my personal subjective aesthetic appeal. Alterations indicated by italics. Many of the changes follow the translated text @ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paschal\\_Homily](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paschal_Homily).

NOTE: Listening to the audio version may help with the effect of the congregational responses.