

## Easter Vigil

*James Dunn*

RCL: Genesis 1:1–2:4a; Psalm 136:1-9, 23-26; Genesis 7:1-5, 11-18; 8:6-18; 9:8-13; Psalm 46; Genesis 22:1-18; Psalm 16; Exodus 14:10-31; 15:20-21; Exodus 15:1b-13, 17-18; Isaiah 55:1-11; Isaiah 12:2-6; Proverbs 8:1-8, 19-21; 9:4b-6; Psalm 19; Ezekiel 36:24-28; Psalm 42 and 43; Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 143; Zephaniah 3:14-20; Psalm 98; Romans 6:3-11; Psalm 114; Matthew 28:1-10

LM: Genesis 1:1–2:2 or 1:1, 26-31a; Psalm 104:1-2, 5-6, 10, 12, 13-14, 24, 35 or Psalm 33:4-5, 6-7, 12-13, 20-22; Genesis 22:1-18 or 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18; Psalm 16:5, 8, 9-10, 11; Exodus 14:15–15:1; Exodus 15:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 17-18; Isaiah 54:5-14; Psalm 30:2, 4, 5-6, 11-12, 13; Isaiah 55:1-11; Isaiah 12:2-3, 4, 5-6; Baruch 3:9-15, 32–4:4; Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 11; Ezekiel 36:16-17a, 18-28; Psalm 42:3, 5; 43:3, 4 (*when baptism is celebrated*); Isaiah 12:2-3, 4bcd, 5-6 or Psalm 51:12-13, 14-15, 18-19 (*when baptism is not celebrated*); Romans 6:3-11; Psalm 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23; Matthew 28:1-10

“I am constantly endeavoring to reduce my needs to the minimum. I feel morally guilty in ordering a costly meal for it deprives someone else of a slice of bread, some child, perhaps of a bottle of milk.”<sup>1</sup> We squirm hearing these words of violinist Fritz Kreisler. The discomfort disappears quickly, however. We all now know that we’re not supposed to feel guilty.

Yet it is timely on this dark day to remember the creation story in which the divine intent to perpetually provide for all humankind is clear (Gen 1:11-12, 29), and God’s satisfaction with that scheme is declared “very good” (Gen 1:31).

If that were not enough for us to see the heavenly purpose, the biblical record is replete with reminders of God’s steadfast love (*esed*) which abides forever (Psalm 136). The message is clear and colorful: “Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!” (Isa 55:1).

Indeed, God’s promised and realized provision, God’s steadfast love and calls to obey his voice (Gen 22:18) put us in perpetual debt to the Divine. Again, in this season we are reminded of the words of Jesus when he said, “From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required” (Luke 12:48). There is such a thing as “good guilt,” God-given guilt.

Awful oughtness is out these days. Duty is dead. In our era we have trouble identifying with Fritz Kreisler’s motivation for simple living. Responsibility and requirement are not popular words. But face grace. Is guilt the issue after all? Luke 12:48 sets out the inexorable law of stewardship. If we observe this somber season with an orgy of apathy, we should feel guilty. If we celebrate God’s great gift without caring and giving, we are violating one of Heaven’s first principles.

We give food to hungry people, extend grace, share God's Word out of grateful hearts for the grace extended to us. The very act of giving shows that we have plugged into God's steadfast love, that we are aware of divine blessing. As the rain falls on the just and the unjust and all humankind looks heavenward, so prayers and praise are offered up. The cycle of grace and gratitude is as real, as universal, and as dynamic as the physical cycle in which the waters come down, sustain the earth, and then evaporate, return, and repeat the process.

The one who receives much will, of course, give much. That is elemental justice, common fairness. Failing to respond to such a formula denies our humanity, the way in which we are all made in the image of God. Godliness alone can carry us across the dark day of sin at its worst and love at its best. Godliness, not guilt, marks our acceptance of moral responsibility for hungry and poor people and represents harmony with the divine order of things.

### *Children's Time [LH]*

In many ways the Easter Vigil is a time of very expectant waiting, when we hear the stories of faith recounted anew. Children are used to that expectancy at Christmas, but Easter traditions are probably more varied. As we await Christ's fresh in-breaking as resurrected Lord in our lives, it may be hard to focus on the "oughts" that James Dunn discusses above. But what does Christ bring other than new life to all people, and isn't abundant food a part of the new life he promises? So with the expectancy comes a sense of commitment to the fullness of life for all and new resolve for us to play a role in ensuring that all are fed.

### *Musical Suggestions*

[LH] Alleluia, Alleluia—UMH 162 Because You Live, O Christ—NCH 231 Come, You Faithful, Raise the Strain—NCH 230

1. *Baptist Review* (Nov.–Dec. 1969) cover.