

# **SOMETHING ELSE :**

a sermon praught by the Rev'd Gerald Keucher  
in the church of St Mary, Staten Island, New York,  
during the First Mass of Easter, on Saturday evening,  
10<sup>th</sup> April, 2004.

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Genesis i<sup>1</sup>- ii<sup>2</sup>; Exodus xiv<sup>10</sup>- xv<sup>1</sup>; Ezekiel xxxvii<sup>1-13</sup>;  
Matthew xxviii<sup>1-10</sup>



**In the Name of God,  
Father, Son and Holy Ghost: AMEN.**



**W**E'VE HEARD A WEALTH OF SCRIPTURE tonight — the Creation story, the deliverance of Israel at the Red Sea, the Prophet Ezekiel, the Apostle Paul, and St. Matthew's Gospel.

These parts of the Bible were written over a period of a thousand years, and they describe events from the dawn of time until a mere 2000 years ago. I want to point out tonight that in each of them God is the principal actor and that in each of them He is doing the same kind of thing. He is giving His people something *instead of* something else:

*Order instead of chaos, light instead of darkness,  
creation instead of nothing.*

*Joy instead of grumbling, confidence instead of fear,  
freedom instead of slavery.*

*Full bodies instead of a heap of dry bones.*

*A new creation instead of our old sinful self.*

In every lesson God is replacing something with something else — this instead of that. Finally, in the Gospel lesson we see the culmination of this action; we see where the dynamic has been heading: God gives Jesus *life instead of death*.

Life instead of death. We are accustomed to think that God has promised us life *after* death. That's a very different thing. The promise of life *after* death means that we need to work hard, pray hard, and hope that at the end we are found worthy to attain the promise.

Life after death is like a carrot out here that is meant to motivate us. If there's a carrot, there's usually a stick. Carrots and sticks go together, because doing something to gain a reward is the same as doing something to avoid punishment. We talk less these days about the traditional stick — the threat of hell. But if we're going to talk about life *after* death as a motivation for staying the course and being good, then it stands to reason that there must be some kind of punishment for not staying the course and for being bad.

Life *instead of* death is completely different. Life instead of death is not a future possibility that may or may not come to us. Life instead of death is a present and permanent reality. We are already living it now, and we will continue to live it in a different way in heaven. Our old self has been crucified with Christ in baptism, and we have been joined to Christ's new life. Life *instead of* death is right now, tonight.

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Here's what I mean. Everything we've heard about God, everything we've read about God, everything we have experienced of God tells us that God is merciful and just, generous and righteous, life-giving and pure.

Everything we know about how the world works without God tells us quite a different story. Human societies are built on a foundation of violence. On our own our societies and their individual members are intolerant and corrupt, selfish and controlling, dealing out misery and death.

You may have heard the story of the frog and the scorpion. The scorpion met the frog on a riverbank and asked the frog to take him across. The frog refused, saying, "You'll sting me, and I'll die." The scorpion swore solemnly that he would not, and the frog was persuaded to take him across. Halfway across the scorpion gave the frog a fatal sting. The frog cried out, "Why did you do that? Now we'll both die." The scorpion said, "That's just the way I am."

And indeed, that's just the way we are when we follow our own devices. We deal out death and oppression to ourselves as well as others. But when the reality of God crosses our world of death, everything is overturned. "Freedom her bondage breaks," the hymn says, "and night is turned to day."

Life after death is the promise of a relationship, as if God said, "Do these 16 Herculean labors, and then we'll see if you're worthy." Life instead of death is having the relationship right now. God is committed to us right now, and we respond to His commitment. We want to live and act in ways that will please Him in the same way that we want to please our spouse with whom we live every day.

As soon as God touches us, as soon as we experience Him, as soon as we turn to Him, God gives Himself to us, and we have life *instead of* death. And once we have tasted the goodness of the Lord, how can we turn away?

Well, we can and we do because you'll notice that there were some things God does *not* give instead of others. God does not give ease instead of hardship, or too much money instead of what we have, or easy success instead of struggle. God's life does not overcome the world of death without suffering.

Our freedom to choose the right brings with it freedom to choose evil. To restore and renew His good Creation, God Himself suffered at the hands of evil and death, and we who are God's witnesses, who live Christ's life instead of death, will suffer as well.

Like the Psalmist, our souls are sometimes full of heaviness and disquiet. Jesus Himself felt abandoned on the Cross. Knowing what is right and wanting to do right is not an easy blessing. In our own time the civil rights martyrs and persecuted Christians in many parts of the world remind us that life in Christ can lead to the premature death of our bodies.

It is not easy to be generous in a society based on what we've bought for ourselves. It is not easy to be selfless when our own ambition cries out for recognition. It's not easy to promote racial justice when the structures of racism are so deep and, what's worse, when those structures benefit so many of us. But dying to self and suffering with God in ways large and small — all this is part of God's gift of life instead of death.

And it is a precious gift. The fact that you are here tonight demonstrates that you have received the gift of life instead of death, and that you have experienced the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord. You're not wandering blindly. You're not just following a set of rules. You have a relationship with the Son of God Who knows what it's like. He's been there and back. You can trust Him now just as all the saints have trusted Him in ages past.

This is the night when thousands of years of prophecy and hope are fulfilled. This is the night when God Himself begins to set right all that has gone wrong in our world. This is the night when God raises Jesus from the dead. This is the night when God gives us — right now and forever — life *instead of death*.

**In the Name of God,  
Father, Son and Holy Ghost:  
Amen.**



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## THE LECTIONS FOR THE EASTER VIGIL

### *The Story of Creation (Genesis i<sup>1</sup>- ii<sup>2</sup>)*

**I**n the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the



darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day. And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day. And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good. And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the third day. And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years: And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so. And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the fourth day. And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl

that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth. And the evening and the morning were the fifth day. And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so. And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.

### *Israel's deliverance at the Red Sea (Exodus xiv<sup>10</sup>- xv<sup>1</sup>)*

And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD. And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to



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serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness. And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace. And the LORD said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward: But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea. And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them: and I will get me honour upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten me honour upon Pharaoh, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen. And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night. And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the LORD looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians, And took off their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily: so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the LORD fighteth for them against the Egyptians. And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen. And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them. But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. Thus the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore. And Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and his servant Moses. Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.

### *The Valley of Dry Bones* (Ezekiel xxxvii<sup>1-13</sup>)

**T**he hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest. Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word



of the LORD. Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the LORD. So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them. Then said he unto me, Prophecy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army. Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves,



### The Holy Gospel      Matthew xxviii<sup>1-10</sup>

**I**N THE END OF THE SABBATH, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.

And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.

And the angel answered and said unto the women, *Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek JESUS, which was crucified. He is not here: for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell His disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him: lo, I have told you.*

And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring His disciples word.

And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, JESUS met them, saying, *All hail.* And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.

Then said JESUS unto them, *Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see Me.*

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The cover shows Henry Ossawa Tanner's *The Two Disciples at the Tomb* (about 1906), oil on canvas. The Creation is by Michelangelo, from the Sistine Caapel; the Morning of the Resurrection, above, by Burne-Jones.