



Easter Vigil 2023 Homily

Standing looking up at Sourmilk Gill as it runs fast down from Easedale Tarn to Grasmere (as a number of you may have done) a well-known scripture scholar, Michael Winstanley, gazing at it, thought, This is how I picture the living water that Christ speaks of. Flowing fast and, as Jesus says to the Samaritan woman, whose story we recently heard, “water which will quench our thirst and become a spring within us, gushing up to eternal life.”

Tonight we celebrate the resurrection of Christ, who in his own new life, gifts to us eternal life as well.

And how do we enter into this gift? Simply through baptism. If we look at the readings tonight so many speak of water, which is the symbol of the Holy Spirit. The Israelites cross through the Red Sea as a sign of baptism as they enter into a new life, a new relationship with God on Mt. Sinai and the Ten Commandments of the Covenant.

In Ezekiel God tells us he will give us “a new heart, and put a new spirit in us; I shall remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh,” a heart that is alive.

And in Isaiah, God’s Spirit is like the rain that falls and waters the earth and enables us to grow and yield a harvest of good things.

What we may ask him tonight is, ‘What good does this baptism do me? How does it affect my life?’ In answer we can start with St. Paul. What does he say? “First we must realise that our former selves have been crucified with Jesus”, but then he goes on to say, then having died with him, we shall return to life with him, in a new way.

Well, firstly we know that Jesus returned in a new way, because after his resurrection his disciples recognized him but also knew that his new life was very physically different. And that is not us in this life.

But it does give us a clue to what might happen when we understand what this new life is about.

It is not that we literally die and rise again here on earth. That wonder comes to us after death.

But here and now that gift of baptism is within us. The Spirit is living within each of us, and waiting for us to respond.

The scripture scholar gazed at the flow of water and the spray bouncing off the rocks, and saw it in a new way. Both as a symbol of the Spirit, as I have said, but also it came home to him what a wonder this creation of God's is. It is not that he could not have seen it as beautiful before, but suddenly something opened up inside him. He wrote a poem, part of it is like this:

I have climbed on rocks and headlands, and the peace has soothed my pain,

I've heard the music of the ice-cold rushing stream,

I have glimpsed the rhythm of my life's unfolding dream.

I have walked along the shoreline, felt my feet sink in the sand.

I have gazed across the water, with a pebble in my hand...

I have known the thrill of friendship, coped with grief and spilling tears.

I have loved so many people whose lives touched mine through the years.

I've heard the music of thanksgiving in my heart;

I can welcome life's end now, when it's time for us to part.

The moment at Sourmilk Gill was not a Damascus-like conversion but a part of a growing understanding of what it is to see the world through Spirit-guided eyes.

When we turn these eyes say to our first reading, we know what a terrible story it seems to us today. But we ask what is the message? It is both a message of profound faith, trusting that God will always have a purpose and only test us as far as we can bear. But also that it points to what God will offer for us, his only Son. It is a prophecy.

Tonight as we renew our baptismal promises, let us ask the Spirit to let us see this world, our relationships, our God, in a new and Spirit-filled way.

To love the idea of being truly alive, with a new heart and a new spirit.