



# CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

## ***Limbo - Easter Vigil- 432021***

May the light of Christ always shine in you, through you, and for you, and may the wisdom of God always guide you to the way of life and peace. Amen.

I was talking to a Lutheran pastor friend of mine during the beginning of this holy week. And he had received an interesting call this past week. He received a call from a potential new member who had some questions about the church and what the church believed. And so the newcomer wanted to know what was his stance on Limbo, Limbo where people not good enough for having go. And I said, my gosh, what a thorny question to be asked, how did you respond to her? And he said, I told her Jesus loves to limbo. Of course, then I naturally said, how low can He go? And He goes low.

It got me thinking about this tradition that we have here on Holy Saturday, the day between Jesus's death and Jesus's resurrection and how there's a strain in the Christian tradition that has Holy Saturday as the day that Jesus plumbs the depths of Hell, the Harrowing of Hell, as some call it. It's both a fascinating and problematic concept to think about.

It's problematic in that the theology was a later addition to the Christian tradition and the concept of how juxtaposed with an all loving God who's reconciling the whole of creation to Himself feels a little bit like mixed message. Nevertheless, Jesus's descent to the dead - that's fascinating that even in death, Jesus Christ's nature, His desire, and His work take Him to the most outer places and spaces in order to save all of us from our worst possible selves.

And I don't know about you, but that to me, endears me to Jesus, our Savior. This is the Savior who refuses to give up on me and you, even when we are worth being given up on. Think about it. Who have you given up on? Who goes into the depths of Hell for you? I mean, we have those usual suspects, right? We have the evil despots of the world, the killers, the rapists, the greedy, the sexually depraved. And maybe you have others in your ring of infernal fire, right? Maybe you have those who betrayed you or the rich or the poor or the lazy or the arrogant. Whoever you put there, Christ breaks their chains and releases them from captivity so even they can have new life.

It's scandalous the good news of the Resurrection. If Christ is willing to go to the most awful nethermost parts of the universe while dead, I imagine nothing stops him now that he lives. The resurrected Christ is everywhere. All those places and causes of hurt and suffering and evil in the halls of power and the drug cartel

warehouses, in those homes with domestic violence. In all those places, Jesus brings a vigor to the work that He began on this Holy Saturday, when He descended to the dead.

And then there's the other scandal of the Resurrection, that there is no one above or below, as the case may be, who will not be saved by Christ's work. This idea is so scandalous. It has been called by some as heretical that Christ will save everyone. But what a thing to believe on this Holy day, when Jesus bursts open the gates of Hell, and that there is no sin that can prevent you from being redeemed by the love of God. No sin is greater than God's love made proof through the life and death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior. There is no cancel culture in the Christian faith. Amen?

Now, while I was researching about Holy Saturday and Jesus descending into Hell, I stumbled across an iconic image for this day created in the Byzantine period in the 14th century. It's in a church called Chora church. It's in Istanbul. And it was built by Constantine as a monastery in the 4th century and rebuilt in the 14th century with some beautiful and fantastic frescoes and mosaics that depicted so many stories of the Christian faith.

But the Byzantine empire was doomed to fail. And not 50 years later after these beautiful mosaics and frescoes were put up, the church was taken over by the Muslim Ottoman Empire and the church became a mosque. And because of the prohibition of human images in Islam, the depictions were covered in plaster for hundreds of years. And no one saw them until 1945 when the country of Turkey converted the mosque into a museum and these treasures were uncovered, including this fantastic fresco, which is in your bulletin

And even though this is a depiction of the Harrowing of Hell on Saturday, as it depicts Jesus breaking down the gates of Hell, tying up Satan in a bundle there on the floor, the artist entitled this piece *Anastisis*, which is Greek for "resurrection." It's about new life for those who have erred and straight like lost sheep.

But what's even more remarkable about this piece is that Jesus has come into the space of the dead to pull from their graves by their wrists. Adam and Eve, the OGs of original sin, no less. They're the ones who know how to do it and do it right. They're the ones who knew better and still did it wrong. And it was they that Christ came to release from the captivity of sin and to set free.

And the artist also depicted, standing new and alive in Eve's casket, her son, Abel, who of course was killed by his own brother, Cain. And, you know, even though Cain is missing from this fresco, I wonder if we can hope that on this Holy Saturday, 2000 years ago, Christ offered his hand in the darkness to Cain, to Judas, to even Satan himself and pulled them from the bowels of Hell.

Now, the story of the fresco doesn't end here because just last year, 2020, the courts determined that the Chora museum should be allowed to be a mosque. So last year in the midst of the pandemic, and to the outcry of Christians everywhere, this fresco and all the others were covered again as Christ now welcomed, again, His Muslim sisters and brothers to pray in that space.

Oh, that Jesus, that mysterious and confounding work of God in Christ reconciling all peoples to himself. It continues. All of this is to say that on this night when we celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord, do not be surprised if tombs are opened and the dead are raised. And all the people who gathered to new life include those who are so thoroughly messed up that they don't belong. And will I get an amen for that?

Now, Louise, you're soon going to be baptized into this crazy wild faith. Bless you. It's going to be stunning because when you are baptized today, this Holy Saturday, when we hear all these stories that have now surrounded you and shaped you and formed you. And as you come to the font and you put your head, Father Bill will pour the water on you and you will receive this new birth and Christ will live in you and your light will shine forth, and you will tell all people that God has come to save them through Christ our Lord. Well, then, nothing is going to stop you, my love.

May the light of Christos shine in you, with you, from you, and through you, and may the Sophia of God guide you in life to the way of peace.

Amen.