

The Rev. Brandt L. Montgomery
March 30, 2013 (The Great Vigil & First Eucharist of Easter–Year C)
Canterbury Episcopal Chapel & Student Center, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL
Romans 6.3-11; Luke 24.1-12

March 31, 2013 (The Sunday of the Resurrection: Easter Day–Year C)
The Episcopal Church of the Epiphany, Tallassee, AL
Acts 10.34-43; Psalm 118.1-2, 14-24; I Corinthians 15.19-26; John 20.1-18

“...Why do you seek the living among the dead...”–Luke 24.5b¹

“...I have seen the Lord...”–John 20.18a

ALLELUIA! CHRIST IS RISEN! THE LORD IS RISEN INDEED! ALLELUIA!

I once heard a story that on one particular Easter Sunday, a Sunday school teacher asked her young students, “What did Jesus first say after rising from the grave?” An enthusiastic student raised her hand, shouting at the top of her lungs, “Ooh, ooh, ooh, I know, I know!” Being recognized, she jumped up out of her chair, flung her hands way up in the air, and said, “TA-DA!” (A highly appropriate story to help begin the Easter season, I think.)

For the 1937 musical film *Ready, Willing and Able*, famed lyricist Johnny Mercer wrote lyrics for what would become the movie’s most popular song and a standard piece of the Great American Songbook. He wrote:

*You’re just too marvelous
Too marvelous for words
Like glorious, glamorous
And that old standby amorous*

*It’s all too wonderful
I’ll never find the words
That say enough, tell enough
I mean they just aren’t swell enough*

*You’re much too much, and just too very, very
To ever be in Webster’s Dictionary
And so I’m borrowing a love song from the birds
To tell you that you’re marvelous, too marvelous for words²*

Mercer’s lyrics highlight the singer’s inability to adequately describe the affections that he/she has for an admired individual. The person in question has caused the singer to become so overcome with positive emotion that no word is good enough to convey

his/her feelings. To put it more bluntly, the singer is simply unable to express his/her feelings with any particular word. Through Mercer's pen, we are presented with the idea of a kind of love that is so overwhelming, so beyond our imaginations that no word within any language can amount to the highest of praise. What Mercer gives us is a paradox—one that shows language's rare inability to give expression about someone that has made a deep impression on us, yet endeavoring to find somehow, somehow to tell him/her about it.

For us, the Resurrection of our Lord brings up a similar paradox. It's an event that makes Jesus have an even deeper impression on us, causing us to love Him more than we already do. Yet our love makes us so overcome with deep appreciation and emotion that it renders us unable to fully "find the words that say enough, tell enough" of the thanks we have for what Jesus has done. Just like the singer of Mercer's lyrics, there simply aren't enough words around that can help us express our love, thanks, and praise for Jesus. It's because of the exorbitantly high price He had to pay for the Resurrection to even be possible. As one of my friends recently said in a Facebook status update on Good Friday, it is "something about the deepest sorrow, hearing the Passion read [that] always breaks me down, humbles me..." The disciples' betrayal, the scourging, the people's mockery, the intense pain of the nails being hammered into Jesus' hands and feet, Him being laid in the tomb, and now having triumphantly risen from the grave are events that have all humbled us. That is why we are unable to fully "find the words that say enough, tell enough" of how thankful we are to Jesus. Because Jesus' Good Friday death was done for us, serving as our reconciliation with God the Father in Heaven, we, therefore, have now been raised with Christ in His Resurrection, sin and death having forever been swallowed up in victory.³ We have been given this victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!⁴ Is it possible for us to ever say "thank you" enough to Jesus? Will we ever find the words that convey our highest praise for the victory He has won for us? I just don't think that it's possible.

But, yet, we strive in finding somehow to tell Jesus just how thankful we are and how enormous our love for Him is for what He has done. Although they may not be perfect, words help us convey our deepest feelings and affections for the Lord. But in addition to words, we tell of our love and thanks by living out Jesus' command to "*...love one another: just as I have loved you...*"⁵ The Resurrection was done out of the love that Jesus has for us. For our friends who know that we are Christians, it is through our sincere love of and for them, as well as ours of and for others beyond them, that lets them know that we are really Christians, with our love pointing them to the truth of Christ's Gospel. Jesus said that "*as you did it to one of the least of these...you did it to me.*"⁶ By "talking the talk and walking the walk" of love, Jesus doesn't hold our paradox of expression against us. This makes our words of praise, whatever they may be, good enough for Him. In the spirit of Julian of Norwich, all has been made well, all is well, and all manner of things shall be well. God hears our praise; He hears our "alleluias!" Because of the Resurrection, whatever we say in thanks and praise to God is good enough.

For Jesus, Mercer's lyrics have the opposite effect, for they are absolutely perfect in explaining the fundamental reasons for the Resurrection. Listen to them again; only this time, picture Jesus saying them to you directly:

*You're just too marvelous
Too marvelous for words
Like glorious, glamorous
And that old standby amorous*

*It's all too wonderful
I'll never find the words
That say enough, tell enough
I mean they just aren't swell enough*

*You're much too much, and just too very, very
To ever be in Webster's Dictionary
And so I'm borrowing a love song from the birds
To tell you that you're marvelous, too marvelous for words*

Friends, the Resurrection happened because Jesus thinks we are "just too marvelous." We are all that wonderful to Him that He was willing to go through the uttermost darkness of despair to cease our strife and forever win for us the battle for eternal life. How better can it be said? Jesus loves us. Jesus died for us. Jesus has risen from the grave for us. The debt for our sin has been paid. We have been freed from the shackles of sin and death. The strife is over and the battle is done. We now live because Christ lives. That, my friends, is THE Good News. Thanks be to God!

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¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations contained herein are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, Old Testament Section, Copyright 1952; New Testament Section, First Edition, Copyright 1946; Second Edition © 1971 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

² "Too Marvelous for Words," lyrics written by Johnny Mercer and music composed by Richard Whiting for the 1937 musical film *Ready, Willing, and Able*, starring Ross Alexander and Ruby Keeler and distributed by Warner Bros.

³ I Corinthians 15.54b

⁴ I Corinthians 15.57

⁵ John 13.34 (ESV)

⁶ Matthew 25.40