

**Easter Sunday  
April 12, 2020  
Easter in the Midst of the Covid-19 Pandemic**

**In the name of the God of all Creation,  
The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,  
And the power of God known in the Spirit.  
Amen.**

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!  
Christ has risen indeed! Alleluia!

I'm not sure I heard you. Let's try that again.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!  
Christ has risen indeed! Alleluia!

That's better.

During this past week ... the holiest of weeks for many reasons ... all of you were in my every prayer. I prayed ... and continue to pray ... for your wellbeing and safety, and for a deeply holy experience of the gift of resurrected life this Easter morning brings us.

The context of this past Holy Week may provide many of us with an increased sensitivity to what the first Easter was like ... the uncertainty, anxiety, and isolation that is defining our common life is as novel as the coronavirus itself. The hope that Resurrection brings is often more clearly evident and accessible to us when we are surrounded by and experiencing loss ... loss of security ... loss of stability ... loss of confidence ... and especially loss of contact with loved ones. In this context of loss, we are often less defended from ... and more vulnerable to ... God's love that was most fully manifested in the death and Resurrection of Jesus.

Obviously, celebrating Easter is different this year. If we were living in "ordinary" times, our celebration this morning would be standing shoulder to shoulder in the pews ... with no social distancing. This would be a festive celebration with an oversized choir, chairs in the aisles, fantastic music, and a sharing of the Peace that would last forever. We would celebrate a holy meal together. We would be gathering as a church family to mark the best and boldest news ever told: "The tomb is empty! Death is undone! Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed! Alleluia!"

The Good News of the Resurrection has not changed. But, the world around us has. We cannot gather in person on Easter. Although your pictures fill the sanctuary ... as much for me as for you ... it is not the same as having you here in person. And, I miss that. We are celebrating Easter by recording through an iPhone and putting the video online ... as best we can. Yet ... in spite of our efforts to work around the precautions and restrictions we must take, the fear,

sorrow, numbness, and shock we feel in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic stays with us ... and it inescapably infuses this worship experience. What does it mean, after all, to celebrate the Resurrection when people near and far are dying by the thousands? What good can it do to insist that the tomb is empty when body bags are in short supply, mortuaries are at capacity, and mourners can't gather to bury their dead?

I don't know the answer to these and many other questions. I just don't know. I'm confused, I'm grieving, I'm struggling. Yes, I believe with all my heart that Christ is risen ... that there is Resurrection ... new life ... new life in which we will all participate ... and that the Resurrection was ... and is ... radically consequential. Yet, I'm still searching. There is so much I long to know, but just don't yet understand.

When this coronavirus pandemic is over ... whenever that is ... and however it is defined ... the world will be a different place than before this all got started. But what that will look like I have no idea. I have hopes ... and I hear others express hopes ... but what this will do to our worldwide culture is a mystery at this point ... at least to me.

I imagine that is the way the disciples felt when Jesus died. They had come to Jerusalem with such high hopes. In the few short years they had been with Jesus they had seen in him what it meant to live life the way God intended life to be lived. They even learned how to live life that way themselves ... at least at times. But, now Jesus was gone. Not only gone, but killed by the powers-that-be in the political and religious world. Killed for living as God's Son.

The disciples were not only alone, but they feared that they, too, might be the victims of the powers-that-be. As the sun set on the night Jesus was killed ... and as the Jewish world moved into Shabbat ... the disciples moved into that darkness of uncertainty. What lay ahead of them? What was their life going to be like now that Jesus was gone?

Then, in the darkness before dawn of the day after the Sabbath, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb where they had laid Jesus ... and she found it empty. She went back to where the disciples had spent the night and told Peter, and Peter and another disciple ... "the one whom Jesus loved" ... ran to the tomb.

John's Gospel tells us that the disciples stumbled around in the half-light on the third day after Jesus's crucifixion, running here and there in their confusion. Were those really angels, sitting in the unlit tomb? Were those misshapen shadows Jesus's grave clothes? The stranger lingering outside with the oddly familiar voice ... was he a gardener? Or ... someone else?

Early in the morning, while it was still dark. That's where Easter began ... and maybe begins for us today. Maybe ... for once ... we celebrate Easter differently. Maybe we celebrate the Resurrection the way the disciples did ... alone, in the silence, hoping that faith outweighs the fears.

In my own life, clarity, hope, and healing most often comes when I'm willing to linger in hard, barren, and dark places ... places where the usual and easy answers prove inadequate. The resurrected Jesus comes in the darkness, and sometimes it takes a long time to recognize him. He doesn't look the way we expect him to look. He doesn't let us cling to our old ideas of him ... of anything else, for that matter. He disappears again just as we try to grab hold of him. But he comes, nevertheless, and he calls our names even when we are lost in grief. And, in that instant, we recognize both ourselves and him.

The Resurrection is about new life. A new life that is full. A new life that brings out the best in all of us. A new life that changes the way we see the world around us. A new life full of appreciation and gratitude. A new life that is full of generosity ... a generosity that gives to oneself ... and gives to others ... the power to live into the fullness of God's image.

That is what the Resurrection of Jesus is about. And, it is what the Resurrection is about today in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic. I really don't know what the world is going to look like after this is all over. But I look to all those who have answered a call to give ... often at the risk of their own lives ... so that others might continue to live ... the doctors, nurses and technicians ... but also those who drive buses, pick up garbage, save lives in ambulances, stock grocery shelves, deliver mail, push bins of dirty sheets down corridors, keep the electricity grid humming and the sewer system flowing, and figure out how to make space in hospitals when none is left."

When this is all over, a certain part of us is going to want to go back to the way things were before this happened. We will want to go back to "normal" ... to what we knew before. But, we will never go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-coronavirus existence was not normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, exploitation, disconnection, rage, hate, confusion, and hoarding. We should not long to return to what we all considered normal. We are being given the opportunity to switch to another garment ... one that fits all humanity and nature.

If the Resurrection is to happen, it will happen in our hearts and souls ... a new life that is not just about us, but about everyone else in the world around us as well. If we just celebrate Easter as something that happened in a graveyard outside of Jerusalem two thousand years ago, I think we miss the point ... and we will continue to be confused about our faith and its place in our lives ... especially now. However, if we see the Resurrection as something that happens to all of us all the time, then we can have hope.

You see, you are the Resurrection. You are the one who can make a new life after death ... all kinds of deaths. Even in the midst of this pandemic ... even in the midst of this isolation ... even in this darkness ... there is a glimmer of a new life that might be ... that can be in us ... in our hearts and souls ... in the small world around us. When we live as people of the Resurrection we can let go of the false security of the past and begin to live a new life ... a new life that goes beyond death. A new life living fully in God's image. A new life in Christ.

Alleluia! Christ is risen.  
Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!

I end with a poem that has made its rounds in social media ... it carries a hope of what that new life might look like.

All the people stayed home.  
And read books, and listen, and rested, and exercised, and made art, and played games, and  
learned new ways of being, and were still.  
And listened more deeply.  
Some meditated, some prayed, some danced.  
Some met their shadow.  
And the people began to think differently.  
And the people healed.  
And, in the absence of people living in ignorant, dangerous, mindless, and heartless ways, the  
earth began to heal.

And when the danger passed,  
the people joined together again,  
they grieved their losses,  
and made new choices, and dreamed new images,  
and created new ways to live and heal the earth fully as they had been healed.

Kitty O'Meara

Alleluia! Christ is risen.  
Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Amen.