

Easter Sunday, April 12, 2020

Acts 10:34-43

John 20:1-18

“On the Edge of Glory”

Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Easter 2020 will be written down in history as a celebration that tradition forgot! Here we are on the day when we celebrate Christ's resurrection and it is rather bittersweet as we join together this way. Yes, we are virtually together but we are not in the same place. It is also bittersweet because what we want is a traditional service where flowers line the chancel, where the choir sings “Alleluia”-filled anthems and the organ and piano resound as music fills our hearts with the joy of Christ's resurrection. What are we really doing this year? For some we are lamenting what today should be- the time when we can gather in various churches, to recognize family and friends and truly wish each other blessings of joy and wonder and love in Jesus. For others, there is a sense of loss of what we should be doing to honour Jesus and the establishment of His church. We must acknowledge the fact that it is because of Christ and those who believe in him that the Christian church exists but without being in our meeting space what are we? Because the tomb is empty, we are to celebrate the joy of Mary, the wonder of the disciples and the faith of all who have come to believe throughout every generation since that Jesus rose from death and is alive forevermore.

But where do we focus this Easter? The lament of what is not occurring or the celebration of new life. We really don't have to choose for both lament and celebration are in the story of Easter. There are many who have difficulties even thinking about Jesus' death on the cross. In fact, Holy Week is just too hard for some because they cannot imagine or see Jesus' the one who welcomed children, on the cross in pain and dying. We have the joy of Palm Sunday and the celebration of new life on Easter so why should one stop and reflect on Good Friday? Well without Jesus' death there is no celebration of life. The seed must die to rise again. So we must focus on both Jesus death, so that we might celebrate his resurrection. And through it all, we will realize again that there is hope.

No living person today and state that they have endured what the world is experiencing right now with the COVID 19 pandemic. Years ago, families were quarantined when childhood diseases were experienced like small pox, tb, diphtheria, but with today's vaccines preventing these diseases, quarantine is not frequently carried out. Yes, there were difficult times when the world was at war but our loved ones were not close by. They were far away and they faced a different kind of danger and death. People were fighting each other in these wars but there were

still people celebrating and rejoicing in the hope of Christ's resurrection by gathering together, praying and worshipping the risen Christ. When these men and women returned home, they did not speak of the horrors of war but why they fought for freedom.

Today it is different as we experience signs of new life and spring. And yes, we may not go out wearing our Easter bonnet or special outfits because we cannot gather in large groups, but we still are able to celebrate Easter. Through one of the most difficult things humanity has ever had to experience we can share in the wonder of Christ's resurrection. And because the church has found a way to keep the chain of the Easter story- Palm Sunday, Good Friday and Easter intact- using the technology of our time we can still hear the story and be moved as we stay home and stay safe. We need to keep the hope that Easter brings because there is so much disappointment- many family events, sporting events, concerts and gatherings of all sorts are cancelled or postponed. Even funerals and memorial services have limiting factors and will be held on later dates bringing forth grief now and of course in through the months ahead. Yet we can still celebrate Easter—remembering times in the past, beginning something new as families, and even just stopping for a few minutes and giving thanks for what Jesus did for us

As we take a moment to reflect on this Easter day we might rediscover our faith in the one who suffered whippings, beatings, torment, and then very weak, he carried his cross to where he was crucified. When all could see him on the cross, the sky grew dark and he gave up his spirit and died. He was later buried and those who knew him best cried, outwardly grieved because of what he stood for, and for them all hope was lost.

A couple of days later, early in the morning Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. She wept and then looked inside the tomb. She saw two angels in white sitting where Jesus' body had been lying. They asked, "Why are you weeping?" She was not afraid of the angels but was fearful because she did not know where Jesus body was. She then looked around and saw a man there and he too asked her, "Why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?"

Mary thought she was speaking to the gardener and asked very formally, "Sir, if you have carried him away tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." "Mary" just one word, her name was all it took and she was on the edge of glory. Right before her was Jesus and she knew him, and came to fully understand. "Rabbouni". Teacher, you are alive!

She had followed Jesus and loved him as the messiah; she became an integral part of his inner circle and cared for he and his disciples. She knew his mother and family and was there when he died such a horrible death. He called her by name and she is looking at Jesus.

Mary's life story has now been changed forever. What is she going to do? She could have asked Jesus hundreds of questions but Jesus told her what to do. Go to my brothers and say to them "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." So Mary ran to where the disciples were- and announced, "I have seen the Lord!"

It is interesting to know that in different translations passive words are used for what Mary shares with the disciples. Mary went and said; she told; she stated—I have seen the Lord. Wouldn't Mary have been overwhelmed and excited to see the Master, the teacher alive? But then again, we have to remember that Mary's position at that time would have been questioned- how could this be. It is in Luke's gospel we read what happened next: Peter got up and ran to the tomb, stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves then went home amazed at what had happened. What else had Mary and Peter experienced by seeing Jesus and looking in the empty tomb? They felt peace. Resurrection peace. They did not have to question their faith in Jesus, they knew him to be God's Son. They had peace and they knew that Jesus was alive.

Easter is an historical fact and it still has ongoing power which gives to each person meaning even Easter 2020. To celebrate Easter means to hear that passion story of Jesus and to know again that he died for you. To know again that he laid in a tomb dead for you. The good news is of course, that he rose again for you. Why? So that you might reconcile with God to be able to walk the ways of Jesus love and to share who we are and what we know about him with others. Jesus is alive and leading the most substantive interesting and consequential life imaginable. Even through this pandemic which seeks to take the breath of life out of each person it attacks, there is life in Christ. Jesus is alive and from this very statement, we have hope to be and to find our lives amidst this time when we often want to lament and cry and grieve our losses. Our lives are on hold right now—the world has been put on pause for many things- yet Christ's love never stops so when Jesus rose again, a new expectation emerged. Christ's resurrection will breathe new life in us- a new day will soon come, a new normal will emerge and we who believe will be ready for it. We are truly on the edge of glory. When the push button is hit and we can emerge from our homes once again, priorities will change and what we hold closest to us will be seen for what they are—our faith, our church, family and friends, all because Jesus' death and resurrection has shown us and will show us again a new way to live.

As we wait out this pandemic crisis, we can be at peace. Jesus is alive and within the hearts of all who believe- The simple question is- do you believe in Jesus? He is the one who

as God's Son could and did pay the price of sin for all of us. We need to believe this and when we fully come to this knowledge, we too will be on the edge of glory—filled with hope, and wonder, joy and excitement knowing that no matter what happens- God is with you. God is with me and we can celebrate the glory of God. For on the edge of glory we find our live- made new through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia Amen.

Let us pray:

God we pray that those who are listening in these moments are on the edge of your glory as they have heard the story of Christ's love given to them through death and through his resurrection. We pray that the story of Christ's passion is power enough to break down the barriers of those who will not hear, upon those who have heard and are skeptical and those who have never heard his wonderful story of life and love. God we pray that your children will receive this message and hold it true in their hearts so that Christ is made real for themselves always. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.