

Easter 2020

Col. 3:1-4; John 21:

You may have already heard a few times or read in so many ways what I'm going to say to start this off: This might be the Easter that you have most closely experienced it like those first disciples of Jesus. We have spent our time in our safe places, away from our friends and extended families as they mourned the death of Jesus. We are mourning the loss of traditions and ritual. The disciples were hidden away in fear of Roman soldiers. We should be feeling a respectful fear of COVID-19 that lurks somewhere out there. Their Passover celebration was cut short by horrific events out of their control. Our Easter preparations and plans have definitely changed from previous years due to something completely out of our control.

Here's what I hope: that you have realized deep in your souls that Easter is NOT about bunnies with baskets of goodies and candy and egg hunts and fancy clothes and new shoes. We have trivialized and commercialized a HOLY DAY.

This year we've had more time to ponder not just whether we believe in the resurrection but whether we have encountered the risen Lord and had our own lives changed.

In the stench of our fear, the uncertainty of our future, our weeping over what used to be, our mourning for our sense of loss, our doubt for what will be, can we feel the breath of Christ on us as he says, "Peace be with you"?

We're trying to avoid being breathed upon these days. We're practicing the oxymoron of social distancing. We can't grasp the big picture of God's plan for us any better than those cowering in an upper room 2000 years ago. Where have we encountered the risen Lord lately?

Jesus doesn't look the way we expect him to. I haven't seen him riding on the clouds with an army of angels blowing trumpets, but I've seen him in the quivering, tear-stained face of a newly homeless woman. I haven't seen him declaring to hundreds of thousands of ill folks "Your faith has made you well" but

I've seen him in an army of home seamstresses making masks for another army of healthcare workers putting their lives on the line in order to help others. I haven't seen him creating some new fantastic bird or flower but I've felt him in the cycle of life, the greening of grass, the budding of trees, the songs of robins, and the clearing of air pollution. For me, all these things speak of death and life and that is what resurrection is all about. None of our encounters with Christ are identical to the next person's. Resurrection happens where there is death, because that is where it's needed.

Jesus doesn't let us cling to old ideas any more than he let Mary cling to the old him. We're forced to slow down right now. It's the opportunity of a lifetime to do some self-examining. To put to death sinful or frivolous or foolish ways. To let the Spirit shape us into new life. It's a time for growth, for change, for a closer walk with God. It's a time to hear Jesus speak our names and for us to respond, "Rabboni!" teacher! Teach me about resurrection.

Covid 19 has not stolen Easter from us. Jesus is not bound by the grave, why would we think a virus could stop him from living anew in our lives?

Jesus is not bound by the walls of our church building, he is manifested in us, as we are the body of Christ. Jesus is not bound by our limited understanding or stagnant imaginations, or the confines of our minds, he is like the wind blowing where it wills. Jesus is not only in our triumphs but our weeping. Jesus is not bound by one day on our calendar, but present whenever and wherever and however two or three of us gather in his name.

Peter and John ran to the tomb, took a quick look, then ran back home. At first, Mary thought Jesus was stolen. She says they have taken the Lord, and we don't know where they have put him! Then, Mary stayed and wept the loss, and she was able to see and hear first the angels, then Jesus. Perhaps there's a lesson there. Stop running, don't let the busyness creep back into our lives. Stay and sit awhile. Say no to the ungodly messes and habits that will try to creep back into our lives making Jesus less and less visible. Search out all the places where we have taken the Lord and now we don't know where we have put him.

As Paul put it in his letter to the Colossians: you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. You died. Jesus also told us we have to die to self. It is scary dying to self. It's hard not to fear the loss of loved ones, the loss of career, the loss of plans, the loss of our sense of normalcy. When we die to self, and concentrate on loving others, we are revived, we are transformed, a better self rises.

Richard Rohr says, "The larger than life, spiritually transformed people I have met have all died before they died." Not that they gave up and lived in despair, but that they received the breath of God and it opened their eyes, their ears, their minds, and their hearts to the service of others and the following of the example Christ Jesus sets before them. They changed. With change, comes a death of some sort. That is what we seem to fear, death.

The good news this day and every day is Jesus Christ conquered death. We no longer need fear it. The peace of the risen Christ be with you. Let us pray: Living Christ, come and breathe your peace into us. Come and breathe your life, your light, your healing, your hope, your comfort, your strength, your victory. Praise be to your holy name. Amen.