**Easter 2020**

**Matthew 28:1-10**

Our Easter celebrations have tended towards the pastel. Past years found us decorating eggs and eating candy and sharing family celebrations in our new seasonal clothes. But that came thousands of years after the first Easter day; today (and for the past millennia) we all live in the light of Christ’s resurrection good news. But not *then*. The *first* Easter Day was framed by uncertainty of what was happening. The disciples were afraid for their physical safety. The first Easter Day found disciples hiding, alone, isolated from their community. That first Easter Day was painted shades of grey and sounded of lament.

The women (the most courageous disciples!) came to the grave already weeping. The other disciples were too tired, too weary, too afraid, too blinded by their grief to come to Christ’s tomb that morning. But when those women went to the tomb, expecting to find silence and stillness and death reigning supreme, they found life instead. They felt an earthquake and saw an angel. They witnessed a tombstone moved and terrified guards. **“Christ’s Resurrection did not begin (or end) with large gatherings of Christians accompanied by choirs and organ blasts.** It began with an “empty tomb”… a tomb emptied of death. And this year, like none other, we, too, are greeted with emptiness. This year our sanctuaries and parking lots are utterly empty – not in despair, but in testimony that salvation (**our neighbors’ lives** are being saved) as we encourage – and even demand – the emptiness. The emptiness is what saves us, then and now.

**We *have been* blinded by our grief; we expected to be grieving over our empty church, but now we find unexpected life. *This* emptiness is life-giving.** In our empty sanctuaries (and in our at-home faith practices) we are testifying to what the angel announced at the tomb, “He is not here.” According to John’s Gospel, the resurrected Jesus made his first public appearance with his disciples in their social isolation, huddled in fear—a locked room. Of course, their social isolation was for a different reason than ours. But no matter. He wasn’t in the tomb. He wasn’t on the cross. He wasn’t in jail. He wasn’t in any one location any more than he’s here in our sanctuary. He *isn’t* here. At least, he isn’t *just* here. He’s out and about, moving down the road, visiting overflowing hospital wards, holding empty hands, loving grieving hearts. He is not here. And that is good news for us and for the world! These are the words we should put on a banner in our field during these weeks of closed doors: “He is not here.”

And why does it matter that Christ is *not* in the tomb? Why does it matter that our Lord was *not* there. It matters because that emptiness was the sign of victory in an ultimate battle between life and death. That emptiness was the winning hail-mary – the last-minute score in a nail-biter of a game between bitter rivals. That emptiness proved once and for all that *nothing* would separate God from the creation God made and loved. As Paul wrote to the church in Rome, “If God is for us, who is against us? … Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword?... No, in all these things we are *more than* conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth nor *anything else* in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” [[1]](#footnote-1)

Sin stood between us and God. Death stood between us and God. So God found a way to remove the problem. God cleaned the slate. God emptied the cross, emptied the tomb, and left that triumphant emptiness as testimony to the world. Our Almighty Conqueror slew the beasts that lurked in our shadows. As Martin Luther wrote, “Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing; were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God’s own choosing: dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus it is He; Lord Sabaoth, His Name, from age to age the same, and he must win the battle. And tho’ this world with devils filled should threaten to undo us, we will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph thro’ us: the Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him; his rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure, one little word shall fell him.” [[2]](#footnote-2)

We enter these Holy Days in similar fashion to that first Easter Day. We are framed by uncertainty of what’s happening and questions of our physical safety. We lament. With masks covering our sobs, we are blinded by our grief. We are hiding, alone, and isolated from our community. And yet, we can trust that **Christ will surely find us this Easter, wherever we have isolated ourselves.**He’s done it before. [[3]](#footnote-3) Just because we aren’t together, in this sacred space, all is not lost. “He is not here. He has been raised and is going ahead of us.” Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.

1. Romans 8:31-39 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” text by Martin Luther, vv. 2-3 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Some of the references were drawn from an email by Rev. Dr. William Brown (CTS Old Testament professor). “The Life-Giving Emptiness of Easter” from Columbia Seminary email to alumni [↑](#footnote-ref-3)