

A Easter 4.12.20

Matthew 28:1-10

Focus Statement: Christ is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

Alleluia, Christ is risen! *Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

I can't hear you, obviously. But I wonder if there was the same confused delay that I usually get on Easter when I start my sermon with that call and response. I know it's because you're not sure if you're supposed to respond or if I'm just making a rhetorical statement, but I always wonder if there might be a little hesitation because we're all not quite sure yet.

Today I admit a similar hesitation, because today just doesn't quite feel like Easter. Don't get me wrong, it's nice to wear slippers to church—and yes, I'm definitely wearing slippers under the table—but this is not where I want to be this Sunday. I want to be in our sanctuary, with you. I want to be just a little bit anxious about having an allergy attack from the overwhelming aroma of lilies, something I now consider a blessing after the year I forgot to water the lilies and we had the saddest Easter display. I want to be full of Doug's long-awaited donuts and whatever delicious egg bake Eileen made, Doug Markusic's homemade bread, and Rose's bunny cake. As an aside, Travis and I did make a bunny cake which we will be enjoying after worship, but Rose's mold is cuter than my sort of scary bunny drawing.

Mostly, I want to be with you in worship. I want to come into the sanctuary to David playing the organ, and Tish and Jeff and maybe a couple other Anderts on the brass. I want to feel the swell of voices as we sing Jesus Christ is Risen Today! I want to hear the results

of the choir's hard work. When I call out Alleluia, Christ is risen! I want to hear you all boldly chime, Christ is risen, indeed, Alleluia. Because it takes a few tries, but we always get there. Holy week and especially Easter Sunday are very busy times in the life of a pastor, but they also feel the most sacred and the most clear, because I know my role. I know the journey we are going on together, and it is a blessing to travel that road with you.

And at Trinity, there is always another special part of Easter: it always marks the time when the snowbirds start to trickle back in and those who have been in hibernation for the winter start to reappear. I want to see the Eversons back from Arizona and know that the Kolodzieizycks, the Davis's, and Dorphine will soon be on their way. Things get real quiet around Trinity in February and March, and Easter marks the time when I feel our ministry start to shift towards the summer.

These things are not to be this year. And I'm sad about that. I'm sad, and I don't know how long it will be until we can regather again. Our governor has extended the Stay Home. Stay Safe. Order through the end of April, and it seems likely that even after that our return to normalcy will be slow. I don't know when we will be able to be together again.

So I'm sad about that. I'm sad, but I've also experienced tremendous joy and blessing in these weird Facebook Live worships. I mentioned Easter marks the time when I start to get excited about seeing people again. But this year thanks to the miracle of technology, I'm getting to worship with all sorts of people I wouldn't have otherwise. John and Gloria are here, the Eversons, the Davis's. The Robinsons have been tuning in from Ann Arbor,

Maxine's with us. I know David Herdman's here, and I found out the Crowes have been tuning in. Great to have you with us again, we've missed you! We've had St. Peter folk hop over after their service is done. Several of our mission partner congregations are following. A friend from California tunes in to our service before he goes to his own—Hi Jonathan! I'm sure I missed many others, so know even if you weren't named, I'm glad you're here and glad we're together. And while I am in no way advocating for this being our new normal, man do I love getting to be with you all in this way, especially those of you who I wouldn't get to be with at all were it not for this strange venue.

It's complicated knowing how to feel in this Stay Home. Stay Safe. Time. On one hand, I am grateful to have a home, to have a paycheck that keeps coming, to have so much time to spend writing and spend with my cat. And with Travis, but Travis is essential staff and still goes to work every day, so a lot of time it's just me and Cat. I'm grateful, but I'm also annoyed and scared. Annoyed that things I want to do are being cancelled. I had plans for a June marathon, that's cancelled. Cheetah Chase, my favorite 5K, was cancelled. Travis and I were supposed to go to Arizona in March, we did not. I miss baseball season and runs with friends and eating at restaurants. And the three things I've found I miss the most are the library, bottle return, and green trash pickup. So many sticks with nowhere to go. I'm annoyed, but I'm also scared. As I've mentioned, maybe foolishly I'm not terribly concerned about my own health, but I worry a lot about yours. I worry about what could happen if this thing takes off in one of the assisted living communities where we have members. I worry about the effects of isolation on mental health, even for people who don't get COVID-19. And I worry a lot about the economic effects of the shutdown on the

most vulnerable among us. Some are calling this pandemic the great equalizer, but it is not. Already, we're seeing in Detroit that the ones who face the most risk from the illness itself are also the ones who are losing the most from the shutting down of the economy. Do we stay shut down so that less people die, and destroy the livelihoods of millions of people who are already struggling at the margins, or do we reopen the economy, get those people back to work, and let them, and a whole bunch of other people, including hard-working medical professionals who are putting their lives on the line every single day, die of the coronavirus? I don't like any of the presented options.

Grateful, annoyed, scared, well-rested, exhausted, bored, overwhelmed, hungry. These are just a few of the emotions I find myself experiencing on any given day, at any given moment. And honestly, all of these put us in good company to understand the Easter story we read this morning. Because we think of Easter as this day of just sheer unadulterated joy. There's trumpets and lilies, donuts and bunny cakes, a full sanctuary and the thrill of brass and organ, but those things are not how the first Easter was experienced. The first Easter was experienced by women going to a tomb at dawn to sit and mourn their friend. They were not going to anoint his body, and they were definitely not going expecting resurrection. They went only because they did not know what else to do with their grief but to sit outside a closed tomb and weep. They also, I have to imagine, went to find peace. To honor someone who was more than just another victim of Roman oppression, but someone who they have come to know as their teacher, their savior, their Lord. They went as a visible show of defiance, to make it clear to Rome that Rome could kill his body, but it could not kill his message.

And to their great surprise, they were met at the tomb by an earthquake, the stone rolling away, and an angel of the Lord appearing to tell them, “he is not here, for he has been raised.” And when they went to tell the disciples as they had been instructed, the women “left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy.”

These women filled with fear and joy went to tell the disciples, who went to Galilee as instructed and met the risen Lord. And the text tells us the disciples too, when they saw Jesus, “worshiped him; but some doubted.” Fear and joy, doubt and worship, these seem like contradictory emotions, but the Easter story tells us they are the exact right responses for resurrection faith. We are a people who cling to the impossible promise that life always follows death, and that in the times when the world feels the most out of control, the most at risk, the most chaotic, those are exactly the moments when God shows up and says, in that phrase that echoes throughout every divine appearance, “do not be afraid.”

And while we’re on the subject of divine messengers and their command to not fear, let us pause for a moment and reflect on what the response to that command is. The person being told not to fear is never like, “thanks, divine glowing being with a face like lightening, you’re right. I should definitely not be afraid of you, you’re not scary at all.” No, right, that person is generally described as still being terrified. And what is the divine being’s response to this fear? They do the thing they came there to do in the first place. There is not a single story in scripture where the divine being leaves because the person they were talking to did not show the correct emotional response to their appearance. It’s almost as if

God's work in the world is actually not dependent on us. As if God is going to show up and be God and do the things God promised to do whether we have the right beliefs, or say the right prayers, or hold the right ideas, or, dare I say, join together in worship in the right ways. The Easter story tells us that God actually just shows up on God's own, because not even death, especially not death, will keep God from God's people.

There is a line from the Good Friday service that gets me every year, and it got me again this year, as I sat at this table next to a stack of Harry Potter books and a small porcelain cross, listening to David playing "Were You There" through my tinny computer speakers. The line is this: "We glory in your cross, O Lord, / and we praise your holy resurrection, / for by your cross joy has come into the world." This is the last line of the procession of the cross, and it always feels like such a strange imposition, talking about joy at the end of Good Friday worship, but that is the strange and beautiful juxtaposition of our faith. We believe, we testify, we cling to the promise that in the darkness of death, in the violence of the cross, in fear is where God shows up to God's people most poignantly. The Episcopalians have a lock on what I think is the best line of all Christian liturgy—Doug and Amanda, I didn't call you out earlier because I was waiting for the Episcopalian reference, and hi Tully and CC, just a few of the cats getting religion these days. Anyway, the line is from the Episcopal funeral liturgy and it proudly proclaims, "yet even at the grave we make our song Alleluia." That right there is the promise of Easter.

So here's the promise, dear people of God. Here's the good news. Today is Easter, whether you feel it or not. Whether you believe it or not. What you bring, what you believe, has no

bearing on the promise God has for you. Christ has risen, and Christ will keep on rising until the whole world is drawn into the embrace. So bring your fear and your joy, your worship and your doubt, whatever you carry with you this day. For it is the right response to God. Amen.