

Christ is Risen! He is risen Indeed!!
John 20:1-18

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Happy Easter! While Covid-19 seems to have stopped the world, it cannot stop the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Easter is not canceled and we gather virtually to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ that has broken the power of death.

Easter is happy day for all, but it is happy day because our Christ has risen. Right? I bet you know this traditional Easter greeting. On Easter morning... when people have gathered for worship, a pastor greets, "Christ is risen!" and then, people respond, saying "He is risen, indeed!" Let us greet one another with this traditional Easter greeting. "Christ is risen!" "He is risen indeed!"

"Our Christ is risen. He is risen indeed!" This simple and plain greeting is actually the most powerful confession of Christian faith! Christ died for us while we were yet sinners. God raised him from the dead and made him the hope for new life. I hope that we can experience the power of new life in us.

What does Easter mean to you this year?

Of course, many of us may struggle with the question, "what does Easter mean to us particularly this year?" Personally, this is one of the most difficult Easter sermons I have prepared. The hardest Easter sermon I have ever preached was Easter Sunday 2014. Three days before Easter, a Korean ferry sank. Out of 476 passengers and crew, about 300 died in the disaster and most of them were high school students. The ferry was still under water and the whole nation was grieving. It was Easter but the power of death and sorrow were so real that I had to rethink of the meaning of Easter and Jesus' resurrection.

The current Covid-19 situation is different from the Korean ferry disaster but this global tragedy also hinders us from experiencing the fullness of life and joy of Easter. As a pastor, I have to struggle with the question of how I can faithfully proclaim hope in the risen Christ without neglecting the reality of death and suffering we are facing today.

One pastor has shared his grief over the death of his friend from Covid-19. When his friend started to have symptoms he called the hospital. He was instructed not to come to the hospital. His primary-care doctor prescribed him a flu medicine. He endured a week at home but his condition worsened. He couldn't breathe and eventually was hospitalized. But his lung had already been severely damaged and a week later, his family had to say good bye to their beloved husband and father through a phone call.

The sudden loss of their husband and father was not the end of their suffering. His wife and son were in danger of possible infection, so his she called to the hospital to get a test. She desperately tried to find a way to get a test but no test-kits were available to this grieving family. A hospital staff said, 'you may be infected by Covid-19 so take vitamins and stay at home.'

Not only this family, but more than 10 thousands families are traveling a similar path of physical and emotional suffering. The power of death has become more real and powerful than ever before and it leads us to struggle with the meaning of Easter and the resurrection of Jesus.

What does Easter mean to us this year? How do you experience the resurrection of Jesus Christ today?

In searching for an answer to these questions, we must remember, first of all, the resurrection is a mystery of faith. A theologian says, "The resurrection is not a mystery in the

sense that it can be solved. Rather the resurrection is a mystery in the sense that it must be experienced to be understood... The resurrection is an act of God that transcends our understanding. It is an act of God that needs to be experienced.”¹ God’s resurrection act can be experienced today even amidst adversity.

Mary could not see the resurrected Jesus because she only looked for a dead Jesus

To see the risen Christ, we need faith in God’s promise. Before his passing, Jesus repeatedly told of his death and resurrection. But his disciples did not believe his resurrection. Even Mary Magdalene, the only person who looked out for Jesus, did not believe his resurrection. In today’s scripture Mary is weeping because she thought the body of Jesus was missing. Mary had gone to the tomb to find Jesus but the Jesus she was looking for was the dead Jesus who was supposed to be right there at the tomb. Mary did not believe in Jesus’ promise of his resurrection, so she was only looking for the dead Jesus at the place of death. In fact, the tomb was the only place left for her to recall her memory with Jesus. For Mary, the death of Jesus was the ultimate ending of the story. There was no hope for the future so she wanted to hold onto her old good memories in the old tomb. But, Mary has surely forgotten that it was Easter.

Like Mary, many churches and Christians today tend to look for the dead Jesus only in past memory. We tend to hold on to old, good memories with Jesus and the church rather than seeing the Jesus walking with us today.

I have recently received some old church pictures. Thanks to David Humphrey for keeping all those pictures. I was able to find some pictures of you, maybe a younger version of you. Do you remember the home-coming celebration in 2018? What about the celebration singers at Asbury in 2013? How about the 75th church anniversary celebration in 2005? Does anyone remember the big fun international dinner in 1974? I did not exist on that date. As I looked over those pictures, I had a vision of joyful smiles filling Asbury UMC. The pew was full on Sunday morning and Sunday school was vital. Of course, the Asbury choir had many more members. We all miss those times when our church was full of faithful people with a lot of energy.

In the same sense, we also miss the time when the stock market seemed to march toward it’s highest point in history. We may miss when our society seemed to be safe from Covid-19, despite some other countries struggled with it. We may miss those times because we could clearly see God blessing America and Christ walking with us. But my friends, if we only looked back to find Christ, we may miss Christ here with us today.

As Christ Called Mary, Jesus Christ continues to call us

Mary could not see Jesus even when he was standing right before her eyes because Mary only looked for the dead Jesus. But Jesus had already left his tomb. Mary could not find Jesus because she was looking for the wrong Jesus in the wrong place. Christ is risen and alive. Our Christ is risen and alive!!

¹https://books.google.com/books?id=n9iOCgAAQBAJ&pg=PT123&lpg=PT123&dq=mystery+of+resurrection+is+t+o+be+experienced+rather+than+solved&source=bl&ots=GMqNq3pjk4&sig=ACfU3U1yTSF-VCPg5A4cONJ7_PkHvoJhLQ&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjnebjNfoAhVCg3IEHRrRB0QQ6AEwCXoECA0QMg#v=onepage&q=mystery%20of%20resurrection%20is%20to%20be%20experienced%20rather%20than%20solved&f=false

As Jesus called Mary by name and opened her eyes to see that he had risen, Jesus calls us by name. The living Jesus refuses to be imprisoned in our good old memories. Nothing can hold him forever. Even death could hold him for only three days.

The risen Christ calls us by name today. “Don’t look for me at the tomb. Don’t look for me only in your old memories. I am not there. I am not there. “The way out of the darkness is by moving ahead” into my resurrection light. Don’t dwell on the memories of the past, but remember the future I have for you.” My friends, the risen Christ is with us right here, right now. So, don’t look back to find Jesus, but see our Lord still standing with us even in the midst of our struggle.

Where is Jesus and what is he doing in the midst of this global Covid-19 pandemic? The risen Christ is with Covid-19 patients in Intensive Care Units. A family may not be able to touch dying patients infected with Covid-19 but the risen Christ is with them and holding their hand until the end of their journey in this world. Christ is with those who have lost their loved ones, mourning and weeping with them.

Our risen Christ is with doctors and nurses who refuse to give up and try to save one more patient even on overwhelming days. Christ is with retired medical staff who are willing to return to help others.

Death may prevail but love survives. And where there is love, there is God!

I have heard that some of our neighbors have begun sewing masks and sharing them with those in need of them for free. The Risen Christ is in their act of kindness. If you live near the church, you may see a lot of teddy bears on windows. Since kids cannot go to school, people want to give them a little fun and a glimpse of hope. In this communal act of caring and loving, we can see Christ smiling and embracing little ones in his bosom.

Our Christ is risen! He has broken the shackles of the power of death. The light of new life has been re-ignited by the power of God. The divine light of love and joy is in you.

So shine your light of hope to the world! Share your little light of love with your neighbors through your kind words and gentle act of caring. Proclaim the good news that Christ has risen today! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.