

Easter Day, 4.12.2020

St. Mark's, Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Acts 10:34-43, Psalm 118, Colossians 3:1-4 Matthew 28:1-10

“Do not be afraid”

*Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.*

Good morning. Thank you for joining us online for the festival of the Resurrection of Our Lord on this Easter Day! On Easter Day, the risen Christ comes to us in the midst of fear and uncertainty, and gives us true certainty of hope and peace. Just two months ago, none of us would have imagined that we would not be in church together on Easter, and we probably would not have imagined that we would be gathering online to celebrate Easter! Much has changed in our lives, but the presence of the risen Christ has not changed. Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. Amen.

Though online worship is new to us, many of you have been very gracious and encouraging. Thank you. We are not alone; many churches are gathering online because they cannot gather in the body. This reminds us that the church is a very special kind of community. For Christians going to church is the high point of the week because we feel connected to God and to one another. At the center of the church is the risen Lord, Christ Jesus. It is my prayer that you continue to feel Christ's presence with you every day. This what we celebrate today: the risen Christ abides with us each and every day. Easter is not just one day out of the year, Easter is *a living reality*: 24/7, 365 days a year. Christ is always alive.

To say it another way, Christianity is *incarnational*. John's gospel reads, “*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*” This means that God has come to us in the flesh. Christ Jesus is the Word made flesh, and through faith Christ dwells in us. The risen Lord comes to us before we even go to him. Before we can open our hands toward God; before we can embrace, Christ comes to us. This is the joy of Easter.

The risen Christ is the secret of Christianity. Christianity has thrived not because of great theologians and pastors; Christianity has thrived because of the living Christ. Christianity has thrived across all barriers of language and culture around the world, not because of human power, but because of the power and presence of the risen Christ. Like the words to the hymn “Christ Is alive! Let Christians Sing”- the words of which continue: “No longer bound to distant years in Palestine, he comes to claim the here and now...” The risen Christ is here and now – in this empty

sanctuary and with you wherever you are.

Christianity would have disappeared a long time ago if we were simply remembering a wise but dead teacher from Palestine. However, Christianity continues to thrive across the world and unite people because it is the risen Christ who dwells in us each and everyday, making us Easter people. We are Easter people who call on Christ's name everyday.

Christ is the source of our life and the source of our connection to one and other, even though we must temporarily be apart from one another. Christ says, "*I am the vine and you are the branches.*" As the branches we reach outward in Christ's mission seeking connection with others. As branches we bear fruit that is the justice and peace of Christ.

God's love is complete; it is not partial. God's love in Christ seeks to include everyone. Peter reminds us today, "*God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.*" Christ's resurrection is for all nations and people who fear God and do what is right and good. Christ transforms us from being strangers into being one body the church. Each person has unique gifts that we share together. Together as the church we bear the fruit of Christ for the world.

Yet this time of quarantine has made it nearly impossible to gather together. Not only churches, but nearly every kind of gathering is now fraught with fear and suspicion. Even simple things like trips to the store or getting gas for the car can seem like major expeditions. We have come to fear community. Perhaps you have experienced this: people wearing masks in the store, people not greeting one another, people ignoring one another. We have come to fear community, and yet we long for the restoration of loving community with one another.

On Easter Sunday, we may also feel a sense of grief at not being able to gather together in this holy space where we genuinely feel God's presence. Not being able to gather doesn't mean we are cut off from God, but being cut off from one another is not easy.

This morning I stand before you to share good news: Christ is alive and Christ overcomes your fear and grief. Just like that first Easter morning, Christ comes to us before we can go to him. The first Easter took place long before there were churches. The first Easter took place in the midst of fear and anxiety, and the risen Christ appeared among his separated disciples. Easter is about Christ coming to us before we can go to him. The grace of Easter is that Christ is present in our lives before we are able to move toward God. It is the presence of Christ alive in us that makes us want to go to church, makes us want to pray, makes us want to sing for joy, makes us want to share our gifts

with others, makes us what to welcome the stranger, and makes us into Easter people.

The empty tomb means that Christ is not bound by death. Christ is alive and comes to us where we are, seeking to dwell in us. We become living witnesses to the power of life over death, of good over evil.

On Easter morning, the two Marys went to the tomb and heard the good news that Jesus had been raised. They were filled with both fear and joy. Jesus met them and said, “*Do not be afraid, go and tell my brothers.*” On that first Easter, Jesus overcame their fear. The presence of Jesus gave peace that drove out fear. Jesus appeared to his disciples, who had locked themselves inside. They were afraid to go outside. They could not come to Jesus, so Jesus went to them.

Does this sound familiar? Humanity still finds it hard to go to Jesus. We each lock ourselves away in rooms of fear, places of anxiety, houses of desperation. All of us. I am not just talking about the current pandemic. The current pandemic is a symptom of our fragile and vulnerable human existence. It is another example of our human inability to heal and free ourselves from human limitation and sin. So Christ comes to us on Easter morning and every morning, in our places of fear and death, saying “*Do not be afraid.*”

Easter this year isn’t perhaps the Easter we had planned. Many gatherings of families and friends have been put on hold. People are under orders to stay at home, shelter in place, to be quarantined for medical reasons. Fear of illness and death have separated us from one another. In the midst of our scattered separation, the risen Christ comes among you where you are. Watch for him. *Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

In today’s reading Peter speaks of Christ’s peace. That little word “peace” means joining what has been separated and making it whole again. Christ’s peace makes us whole. Christ’s peace brings together people who are separated by the fear of death. The peace of the risen Christ brings wholeness to a world that God so dearly loves.

Today Paul reminds us, “*Set your mind on the things that are above, not on things that are on earth.*” Christ is already with you. Christ says, “*Do not be afraid.*” Easter is about the living Christ who comes to us with a peace that makes us whole, drives out fear, and draws us up to God so that we can live for others.

Christ is with you today. Anticipate him everyday. He is risen indeed! Alleluia. Amen.