

April 4, 2021

Can you imagine these two women, Mary and Mary, walking to the tomb... Jesus had been crucified... Death had been dealt... Hopes were shattered... There is nothing but grief and despair... Nothing to do but pay respects to the dead...

Kind of sounds like our experience with our past year! Doesn't it? Let's do a little review...

I remember when the first person died of Covid, a resident in a nursing home near Seattle. And unfortunately, it happened to be exactly where Kris and I were going - for a wedding!

When we were there, we had to pick up a few things at a department store, and I remember going in and being so extra careful... I remember imagining that everyone in the store had the virus. I remember feeling relieved when we got out. And believe me, it was nice to get back home to Minnesota!

And for all of us, initially anyway, that simple act of shopping was such a big deal! It was a weird mix of glad to be someplace other than home, but wondering about the virus. We would sanitize the cart, carefully stay 6 feet apart from everyone, we would stand and wait until someone cleared an aisle, before we could go there...

And remember the great toilet paper shortage? Talk about death! There was stockpiling... I remember going to a large grocery store in Hastings and the paper aisle was completely empty—it was weird. And many stores were running out of other things as well.

And wearing masks... Well, we're still wearing them... Getting used to them was horrible... I still feel light headed when I wear one, and I really dislike only seeing half a face! I can't tell if someone is sticking their tongue out at me, or smiling at me. And while masks are for our protection and for the protection of others, masks are still masks, they hide something that is genuinely authentic about our human being-- our expression.

And frankly, we didn't initially know how lethal the virus was. And early on, a colleague of mine, Pastor Craig Breimhorst died of covid. After that, for me, it was real...

Then the death numbers started to climb. I remember paying close attention to New York. They were keeping bodies in refrigerated trucks. I was afraid that was going to spread to the whole country!

And when all this was going on, we had the death of George Floyd, and all the looting and burning of the police building and other businesses. A lot of that happened in my old neighborhood, it felt very personal and real... And currently, the whole country is riveted to see what happens at the trial. I haven't been downtown, but I hear it looks like a military zone, so much security...

And if the year hadn't been crazy enough, we had a presidential election. And people were so distrustful and angry about the results, it culminated in the storming of our national capitol, just three months ago.

It's been a year of fear and uncertainty, everyone is riled up about one thing or another. And it doesn't matter what political team you root for, it seems we're all human and there's enough fear, anger, distrust and violence for everyone.

What a year, huh? It's been a year of death and destruction...

And so, how do we respond to all this... With a year like that, it's easy to see how we can become jaded and paralyzed. It would be so much easier to just put our heads in the sand and forget it all happened... Just hope it all goes away... But, living in denial, doesn't solve anything...

Or, we can become angrier and more distrustful. We can double down on all our fear and hatred. Ramp up our accusations against one another, point our fingers at those who think differently and call people names... Seems like that's what the news channels are doing...

So, we can either ignore it happened, or we can indulge the fear-- neither option is life giving. As Jesus does, he provides a third way; it's called resurrection.

In our gospel reading, Mark records that as Mary and Mary approach the tomb, they notice that the stone is rolled away. And instead of running, they enter... And they hear that Jesus had been raised. Their heads must have been spinning a hundred miles an hour-- What does this mean? There must have been a ton of questions and emotional swings!

The gospel of Mark is known as the "empty tomb" gospel. The original ending of Mark says that the women "fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them;" That's absolutely the right response... Nothing like that had ever happened before... Life and death as they knew it, was suddenly different.

And so is today... As Christians, we are fundamentally people of the resurrection and this is a completely different way of seeing and engaging the world.

Resurrection means that death does not define our life. We are fundamentally different people.

Rather than despair that the world is going down the tubes, we prove that Christ is the bond between all our differences. Rather than be afraid of all our neighbors, we reach out in love to serve them.

Through resurrection, Jesus is bringing forth a new kingdom. And it's characterized by the love we have for one another. It's in the graciousness we extend to one another. It's in the forgiveness we offer one another; in the reconciliation of broken relationships. It's in the healing of those who are sick and the wholeness of those who are dying. It's in the faith of all the Saints who have gone before us.

It's in all the ways we connect, support and include one another. It's in the generosity of opening our hearts to share with one another. It's in all the ministries of this church, all these things give witness to resurrection. All these things are gifts and they shower down upon us all the time. Death has been defeated.

Christ has risen... **He has risen indeed...**

And because of all these things you are a new creation, and for the sake of the world. When the world out there is at war with one another, you are different. This is a new way of being in the world. This is a new kind of eternal life breaking into reality. And by living into these things, we insist that the Kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven. Can you see this new Kingdom?

Jesus is raised from the dead, our God is God of the living, now and forever.
Amen...