

## Presenté Easter Sunday

*Matthew 28: 1-8*

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message for you.” So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

As we begin today's reflection, I would like to you post or write down in the chat box (or maybe just think about) a tradition you have for Easter. And how the tradition is different this year because of our sheltering in place and the current situation. It might be that there are no big feasts or parties. Or the kids didn't get Easter baskets for the first time. Maybe Easter in general simply feels different.

One of the children earlier in the week asked, “When is the Easter Festival at church?” After telling them it wasn't happening this year because of the coronavirus, they asked the more beautiful question, “How can Easter be the same?” Since the festival was cancelled, yesterday we pulled out the face paint, and blew bubbles, and hid some eggs around the yard. It was fun and creative, but our community was missing. Lea wasn't painting faces this year. Brenda and Ruthie weren't hiding eggs and kid's baskets weren't overflowing. Alice wasn't at the craft table. Traditions are missed. And the people we do them with are missed as well.

Sure, we still have lilies, and we still decorated the cross with flowers, and I even pulled out the white robe to wear. But there is an odd emptiness inside of this space, and inside of us. How can Easter be the same with so much loss and uncertainty, stress and anxiety swirling around us?

But then it hit me: this morning is probably more authentic to the original Resurrection Day that we read about in the story. There is an emptiness present. Death has clouded the day. Hope is merely a four-letter word. There is no gathering congregation or alleluias or choir anthems. There are only a bunch of scattered disciples, and a couple of grieving women who end up confused and afraid and uncertain about what to do next. Sound familiar? Within Easter morning is the presence of mystery and loss, anxiety and confusion. It's a mixed bag of fear and joy. Because our “He is risen!” only makes sense if we hold it in tension with the reality that, “He has been crucified.”

Matthew's gospel is the only one that mentions Jesus' crucifixion on Easter morning. "I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified." Why? Because resurrection is connected to a deeper story about someone who was rejected and made an example of by the power structures within a specific political, economic and religious context. And while I want to be perfectly clear that resurrection is for everyone, and for anyone who finds themselves losing hope during these times, it specifically mentions this hope for those who are discarded by a system that believes their lives do not matter.

This year as made a pilgrimage to the front porch of the church where we decorated the cross with flowers, I noticed something remarkable: when there were no more pre-drilled holes to put our flowers into, some of you put flowers and stuffed pedals into the cracks of the wood. Perhaps you didn't know how theologically smart y'all are (or perhaps you did!). Easter says that life is blooming with hope, especially for those who are in society's cracks and have nowhere else to turn.

Jesus does not die from getting sick. He does not age out or die in his sleep. He was crucified as an enemy of the state who promoted a more robust economy for the poor, he stood with an assortment of people in the cracks, and he carried the lethal cross of an oppressive elitist system on his shoulders.

It is what makes the angel's message so powerful this morning: "...Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; he has been raised." Resurrection is God's definitive "NO!" to all the ways that our political, economic and religious systems sow death and discard other's humanity.

So when powerful politicians try to legislate who is worthy of healthcare, or a living wage, or which children can have equal opportunities to flourish, resurrection says "No!" because he has been raised.

When the death rate of the coronavirus or any other disparity impacts one group more than others because of a racist system that has always benefited one racial group over another, resurrection says "No!" It doesn't have to be this way, because he has been raised!

Jesus being resurrected is God's definitive "No!" against all the ways death manifests itself. Which is why if any institution or administration targets immigrants, or devalues women, or LGBTQ friends, or moves against the fullness of life for creation, we stand against it and say, "No!" because this is our deepest Easter tradition.

Back in the 1970's while the El Salvadorian regime starved the masses, and as death squads performed unspeakable acts of violence against the people, churches would have an Easter tradition they would perform on Easter morning. As an act of resistance, they would read out loud the names of those who went missing, or had died, or been killed. And for each and every name someone in the congregation would cry out, "Presenté!" ("Here!").

Every person we have lost or anyone whose life has been taken is presenté through the church of the One who was crucified but has been raised.

Carlton Eversley: Presenté!

Bob Pursley: Presenté!

Sallie Heald, Vi Brady: Presenté!

Jack Wooten, Bill Mabry, Anne Maddrey: Presenté!

All whose life and love has impacted ours: Presenté!

We can say this and mean it because Jesus is not in the tomb. He is here. Rising up through people who live out resurrection's reality in their lives. People like you.

While I know we are all struggling with Easter feeling different; while COVID-19 fills more and more body bags. While each day we are emotionally and mentally exhausted by 5pm—or maybe by noon. I want you to know that in the midst of this crisis, not only have the flaws of our system been exposed, but the goodness of your hearts have been revealed as well. From checking in on one another, to making masks, to running errands for those who are vulnerable, to reaching out for people's birthdays, to lifting up workers who are exposed, to caring for the disenfranchised as best you can under these circumstances. And it is this kind of love poured out that convinces me, death cannot win. As it turns out Easter isn't that different. It has been here, happening the whole time.

The Body of the risen Christ. Among us. Within us. Presenté!



(Pic is of the flowers packed into the cracks)