

In These Uncertain Times  
By Rev. Michael Blackwood  
United Church of Broomfield  
April 12, 2020  
Easter Sunday

Matthew 27:59-28:10 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

59 So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth 60 and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. 61 Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

62 The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate 63 and said, "Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.' 64 Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has been raised from the dead,' and the last deception would be worse than the first." 65 Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can." 66 So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

28 After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. 2 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. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 4 For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. 5 But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 7 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." 8 So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

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He is Risen! He has risen indeed!

With Covid-19 and all of the stay-at-home measure in place, it feels like a lot of efforts to cancel Easter this year, but Easter cannot be canceled. Two thousand years ago all the forces of evil tried that, and it failed. The forces of evil tried to kill the infant Jesus. Their plan failed. The same forces of evil used the political power of Rome to crucify Jesus. The forces of evil did not know they were foils in the mighty hand of God. God's plan was to erase our broken commandments ... on the cross... then destroy death forever by raising "Gods-self" from death and the grave. A sealed tomb could not contain glorious light of the resurrection of Jesus.

Easter is here! He is risen! He is risen indeed!

Hopefully, the "sheltering in" on this Easter Sunday has reminded us that Easter is not about new Easter clothes, for which we could not shop this year. With the stay-at-home orders, there

are few, if any Easter egg hunts happening, leaving thousands of Easter baskets and chocolate eggs on store shelves. It wasn't about eggs and chocolate anyway, right? In these uncertain times, perhaps we have learned other things about ourselves and life.

Easter is about Jesus. Easter is about hope. Easter is about faith in the face of uncertainty. Easter is about Jesus' resurrection from death and the grave. Easter is knowing that death on this earth is not the end of living. Your soul, your spirit, was created by God to live forever. You know it in your soul, in your heart. The Easter event shatters all fear, all doubt and all uncertainty, because the resurrection of Jesus strips evil of its power to hold people in the fear of death.

If, on this Easter morning you feel uncertainty, particularly about your eternal life, then hear the truth your soul longs to hear. Jesus is alive! He has risen from the dead! He is the "hope" your heart longs to know.

We all are grieving losses during this pandemic; losses like freedom of movement, loss of agency and choice, loss of a feeling of safety and a sense of normality. For some there are heavier losses - income, employment, or healthcare. Around the globe, there is grief over the loss of life due to COVID-19. Loss of a spouse, a child, a parent, or a friend.

Death has come like a ruthless thief, snatching away a treasured presence, leaving only hollow memories in its' wake. This sadness of grief casts a spell of loneliness, for some hopelessness, too powerful for spoken words or shallow songs to break.

On a Sunday morning 2000 years ago, the disciples of Jesus were hiding in a locked room. They were without hope, feeling uncertain. They were afraid to go out into the streets. Afraid to show their faces, unless there was a mask to cover their face. On this Easter we can understand their fear as we sequester behind closed doors and shuttered windows.

There is nothing like the truth of Easter to bring hope back to life.

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In the Easter hymn, "At the Lamb's high feast we sing," we sing:

Easter Triumph, Easter joy, This alone can sin destroy  
From sin's power (the) Lord (has) set us free; Alleluia!

No more can death appall, Now no more the grave enthrall,  
(Jesus) has opened paradise, And Your saint in you shall rise; Alleluia!

In the song, "Because He Lives," by Bill Gaither, the words proclaim the Easter hope;

Because He lives I can face tomorrow  
Because He lives all fear is gone  
An empty grave is there to prove my Savior lives  
And life is worth the living just because He lives

From the book of Job, we read;

I know that my redeemer lives, And on the last day, He will take His stand on the earth.  
Even after my skin is destroyed, Yet in my flesh I shall see God. (Job 19:25-26)

This is the truth of Easter. These words provide hope. This is the message of Easter for those locked behind closed doors, fearful to step into the light of each new day.

Easter has its own proclamation: “He is not here, He has risen from the dead.”

What great news we possess, especially in these uncertain times. We dare not allow shuttered windows and closed doors to snuff out our Easter joy and hope. The good news of Easter is not that Jesus lived and died, but that He died on a cross and rose from death in a resurrected, glorified body on a Sunday morning 2000 years ago.

Evangelist Billy Graham wrote: “Without the resurrection, the cross is meaningless.”

"Without Jesus' death, we have no hope of God's forgiveness; and without Jesus' resurrection, we have no hope of eternal life. Like the two wings of an airplane, both are essential!"

**Both** the cross on which our broken commandments were nailed and the empty tomb of Jesus have shattered the fear of death. The cross and empty grave remove the wrath of a Holy God from the human heart. Easter celebrates God’s dramatic rescue operation giving you and me a righteousness which we could not ourselves earn.

The Easter event enables us to see hope beyond the shuttered windows and locked doors. We have been told to stay-at-home because our national and state leaders fear the virus stalking our streets. It lingers in the air beyond our doors. The disciples “sheltered in” after the death of their Rabbi. The fear of death that stalked the streets of Jerusalem was too much, and they were afraid. We can understand their fear.

When the resurrected Jesus entered their shuttered and dark room, their hearts were set free with hope for living. When Jesus enters a locked heart, the sun shines bright after the grief of tears at a borrowed grave, or a sealed casket.

We dare not allow Easter to be canceled, nor pass without rejoicing in and declaring our hope. It is Jesus Christ—the miraculously resurrected Son of God—who remains the object of our worship and the subject of our praise. It does not matter whether we are “sheltered in our homes” or gathered together in a sanctuary. Easter cannot be canceled.<sup>1</sup>

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The phrase “during these uncertain times” is appearing in emails and social media messages quite frequently these last few weeks. For many it has become a daily reference, even a bit of a joke:

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from "He Has Risen, Truth For Those Behind Locked Doors," by Clarence Eisenberg, 4/10/2020

“Did you eat the last of the chips?”

“During these uncertain times, one must take nourishment where one finds it!”

But ... it is evolving. After 4 weeks of social isolation, steep technological learning curves, and elevated ambient stress, the phrase has come to mean, “choose compassion.”

“Did you finish the laundry?”

“In these uncertain times, I forgot to put it in the dryer. Would you mind?”

“I can’t believe that person hasn’t done what I asked them to do!”

“In these uncertain times, they might need a gentle reminder.”

These are uncertain times.

Today, Christians around the world, reflecting on “uncertain times,” are deciding how to observe Easter at a distance from our communities. As we reflect, consider this;

Jesus was captured, suffered, and died. His friends were right in the midst of fear and grief. Their teacher was gone. He had promised them amazing transformations, but all they felt was the exhaustion of very “uncertain times”.

Uncertain times are transformative times. We are asked, or forced, to make very big changes in a short time. Our sense of predictability vanishes, and there is no auto-pilot. We must re-learn how to live in our own lives. We must leave parts of our experience behind us. We grieve. We have longing. We need things we cannot have. We are lost.

There are no easy answers during these times, but compassionate care of ourselves, our loved ones, and our community seems to be the one certain thing. We find hope in the resurrection and in compassion. We are certainly “suffering with” one another these days. Compassion asks us to move into that co-suffering purposefully. We must consider the heart of the person and find a response that honors them at the core of their pain.

Compassion is a pillar of Buddhism. Love is a pillar of Christian teachings. Seek comfort in looking to the pillars...the certain things in these uncertain times.

In reality, all times are “uncertain” times. We are not promised any moments beyond our current moment, but we can look to these pillars to keep us stabilized. We can focus on the Risen Christ who triumphed over death.

May you find certainty in the knowledge that you are worthy of giving and receiving love. Rest assured that God’s loving grace provides your eternal salvation in the resurrected Christ. May you feel cradled in the strength of compassion and the hope of an empty tomb. May this be true in these, and all, uncertain times.<sup>2</sup>

“Because He lives, I can face tomorrow. Because He lives, All fear is gone.”

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Facebook post by Carly Flagg, 4/10/2020

Amen