



## Sermon for Easter, April 2020 New Life – New Life!

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene

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*Acts 10:34-43 Psalm 118:1-2,14-24 Colossians 3:1-4 Matthew 28:1-10 John 20:1-18*

Oh Risen Jesus, our Savior, Master, Friend, Lover, God-with-us, Lord of Life – be near to us in this time, give us a glimpse of you risen in glory and opening new life to all, hold this world close, and draw us to the awe and hope and promise of new and everlasting life in you. Amen.

Christ is risen.

Christ is risen!

I'm passing this on to you.

It's true.

It's the word of surprise and hope, and the amazing unexpected thing.

The Lord is risen.

This said in hurried, energetic whispers – and in hushed and urgent tones

in rooms shut tight for fear.

Word passed on, from one to another, from house to house, in spots along the roadways.

It is the Third Day – and Jesus, Emmanuel, is risen from the dead!

These days, it is easy for us to get absorbed in the gloomy news as we all wait, across the world, to ride out the storm of this virus that is hitting like a plague. We wait, and we stay apart so as not to spread the virus, and we learn new ways to pass the time as we hope and pray that the virus will steer clear of us, our loved ones, and our communities. And we pray for those wrestling with the disease – the people working on the front lines of healthcare, and the people who are contending with this terrible virus.

Today, even apart from one another, cloistered as we are in our own homes much like those first followers and friends of Jesus were after Jesus was tried and crucified and buried – today, even huddling in care for one another and carrying on with life in a different way than we ever expected, and wondering what the future will bring – today, let the news of Christ Jesus' resurrection come to you.

"I have seen the Lord!"

"Christ is risen!"

Whisper it to one another. Now – to someone in your home with you, or to someone in an email or text or phone call. Let the word of hope come forth from your lips. Let the word of awe and love land on your years and in your heart.

*“Death with life contended: combat strangely ended!  
Life's own Champion, slain, yet lives to reign.”*

“I have seen the Lord!” So comes the word from the women close to Jesus who stepped out from their shelters at daybreak to visit the tomb of their beloved teacher and healer and master and Lord who was a friend like no other they had ever known. On behalf of all the others huddled, they went to the tomb to say prayers and remember and watch. Because they loved him.

And Christ arose. The tomb shook, the stone rolled back, and Christ came forth – arising for all.

I love the reading from Matthew for Easter – this earth-shaking account of the resurrection. This Gospel offers us a glimpse of the moment of God’s stirring power bursting from the tomb. In that moment of rising, guards who were only there to fulfill a duty of keeping guard and preventing mischief, blacked out and fainted. They were taken down by the unexpected, and by fear – an unknown and unexpected fear of the Living God. Now, the women there at the same time, but they came drawn by their love for Jesus and for all that he taught and gave and opened for them and for the whole world as they knew it. Their hearts were drawn to see the One they loved. And so, the bright messenger of God told them not to fear. And then, they are invited to “Come and see,” and then to “Go and tell.” And then, on their way back to the others, still in a stir of confused mix of sorrow and joy and uncertainty and awe and hope, Jesus meets them and says, “Rejoice!” and then tells them “Do not be afraid,” and “Go and tell.”

I also love the reading from John for Easter, for its tenderness. Mary, riddled with the sorrow of her loss of Jesus, cannot really quite see what is in front of her. She does not really grasp what the bright messengers are saying. And she does not expect to see Jesus greeting her, and mistakes him for the gardener and in her grief and panic begs him to show her where Jesus’ body is. And Jesus breaks through all that is binding Mary in grief and inner anguish by calling her name. Jesus names her, and she knows that deep experience of being known and loved by the One she has loved and had lost. Christ Jesus, lover of her soul, is alive.

“Christ is risen!”

“I have seen the Lord.”

In our Easter reading from the Epistle to the Colossians, we hear the great invitation, to set our sights on things above.

“Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.”

Friends, we do not need to fear death. We have died already, as we have followed Jesus on the Way of Love and Life – we have died to sin and to the entrapments in the world and within ourselves. God has opened new life for us. We have already died, and our new life as children of God and as brothers and sisters of Christ, raised anew, is hidden and treasured and held in trust with Christ Jesus, the Lover of all humankind and all creation.

Fear is part of our natural earthly life, and yet Christ invites us across a threshold to more, to something that transforms our fear to wonder, awe, and amazement. “Do not be afraid.” “Rejoice!” “Come and see.” “Go and tell.”

*“The tomb the Living did enclose;  
I saw Christ's glory as He rose!*

*The angels there attesting;  
shroud with grave-clothes resting.*

*Christ, my hope, has risen:  
He goes before you into Galilee.”*

Oh, friends, come and see.

I invite you to a holy and lively Easter season.

Today, and each day for this next week, read through the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ resurrection – alone and with each other. Look to the ending chapters of each Gospel. Follow these readings each day – I will send them out each day this week. Let the story sink in, seep into your mind and heart, touch and awaken you anew. Let yourself come and see. Greet the dawn each day with hearts rising in awe and gratitude. Christ is arisen!

And – Today, and each day for this next week, write a word of God’s Good News to someone you have not written to in a while. Send a note – by mail, by email, by text. But take some time to communicate with someone who may be feeling this aloneness deeply. Reach out and tell someone the words of promise, of hope, of Christ’s rising and of the new life that opens up for all of us. Reach out and offer something of God’s love and delight.

This can be even in a time of sorrow or anxiety such as we face. I remember my grandmother, a survivor of the great flu epidemic of 1918, such a tender and loving soul. After my mom, her oldest daughter, died, my grandmother was on the phone with her remaining living daughter, crying, in that way that a reserved person does, as she pleaded with her remaining living daughter to come once again to God’s loving arms. Sorrow and hope and love and wonder do live together, in the life of Christ, in the very heart of God.

Today, Pope Francis called on all Christians, and all people, to be in prayer for those who are sick, are dying, or have died – and for their families and friends and neighbors – and for all who care for those who are sick or dying. Francis also called on us to offer that hope and promise of Christ, the Lord of Life, to all – and to share in loving care for all, no matter who we are. Go and tell.

Yesterday afternoon, in anticipation of Easter, with my face-mask on, I walked all around the Sacred Heart and St. Joseph’s hospitals and medical centers in Spokane, praying as I went for everyone in those buildings, and laying hands on the cement and brick corners of some of those buildings praying for God’s presence and healing balm. Along the way, I saw signs posted by the Slavic Baptist Church in town, around the hospital, letting people know that they were praying for all healthcare workers. Go and tell.

Go and Proclaim the resurrection, however you can at this time – spread the message of hope, redemption, ultimate healing, gift, victory.

Begin with people in this community – this little community of faith. Call someone today, and say the great Easter greeting to each other.

Christ is risen!

The Lord is risen indeed!

Whisper it to one another. Say it in those hushed and urgent tones to one another, like the first disciples. Make it a game of telephone tag – pass the message on from one to another to another. Let the good word of Christ's rising, of God's triumph, trickle forth from you like living water. And let your words, even in this time, be seasoned with the holy spark of Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

Alleluia. I have seen the Lord. He will meet us, in our rooms and houses, and once again in Galilee or wherever we end up going forth after this time.

Happy Easter, friends.