

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

At the beginning of this COVID-19 crisis, I was struggling with how to respond.

- Many of us can be brave
- We would be willing to take a risk upon ourselves to help someone else.
  - A mother would protect her child
  - A husband would protect his wife
  - A friend would go out on a limb for a friend
  - A camp counselor would traipse through poison ivy to rescue a lost child

But with coronavirus, it is not so simple.

The risk is not just to me, but also to you.

Any one of us can infect others – without knowing it.

Thus, the decision to take the risk of becoming infected by being in public spaces belongs not just to you or to me, but to the whole community.

So, we are social distancing, wearing masks, washing our hands, protecting ourselves so that we can also protect others.

It is an act of love for our neighbors.

In this COVID-19 season, it is brave to stay home.

Of course, the people on the front lines of this pandemic are heroes – the medical workers, nursing home caregivers, and

Those who provide essential services --grocery store personnel, delivery persons, postal workers, and farmers –

But they are also heroes who stay home and forego the parties, the graduations, the spring breaks, the happy hours, and the beach vacations.

This is hard!

They are also heroes who endure seemingly endless zoom meetings and who continue to work from home, with kids underfoot and no breaks.

This is hard!

They are also heroes who cannot work and who are waiting patiently for what will come next – the old job? A new job?

This is #\$\$%^@ hard!

Yes. It is. And we could sit around all day and complain about it.

But as Christians, this reality is not the only reality, and it certainly does not have the last word.

**We have something more to say about our current circumstances – something more to say about where this is all headed.**

And no one else will be saying it – not Dr. Levine, not Dr. Fauci, not Governor Wolf, not Pres. Trump, not any pundits or newsrooms.

**It is up to us Christians to say it.**

What is this “something more?”

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

There is hope beyond COVID-19.

It may change our lives – but it will not destroy us. It cannot.

Its power is limited.

The opening verses of Psalm 46 come to mind:

*God is our refuge and strength,  
a very present help in trouble.*

*<sup>2</sup>Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,  
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;*

*<sup>3</sup>though its waters roar and foam,  
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.*

*though COVID-19 rage and though the economy come to a halt.*

*God is our refuge and strength – a very present help in trouble.*

How is that true? How does God manage that?

The answer begins with a baby,

- Then a baptism in water and a baptism in the Holy Spirit,
- Then a baptism of death on a cross, and a new birth of resurrection.

*Jesus* is how God is present in our times of trouble.

Jesus, God in human flesh and blood, whose death destroyed death and who now lives where death has no power at all.

Jesus limited the power of coronavirus before we even knew it existed.

**Jesus has already defeated it by his death and resurrection.**

We are just catching up to what is already true in the eternity of God.

Therefore, we need not fear for our future.

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Did you hear St. Peter in his letter to us this morning?

What comforting words these are!

Did you hear them?

*The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has given us a new birth into a living hope by baptizing us into the resurrection of Jesus.*

- The new birth means that the old order has no power over us
  - Death has no power over us because it is already defeated.
  - When we were baptized, we already died our death and were raised from the dead to share Jesus' eternal life.
  - Yes – Baptism is that powerful. The word of God is that powerful. The promise of God to us is that powerful.
- **The new birth of baptism changes the course of our lives from resignation to fate,**
  - or karma, or the notion that “this is all there is”
- **To a life lived in hope** – a living hope
  - – a life that sees and acts toward a horizon that is not dark, but bright;
- A life that sees no glass half empty or half full,
  - but that sees every glass, every situation overflowing with abundant love, grace, and mercy,
  - **because God is present in it.**

*This new birth means we inherit the riches of God – and this inheritance is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.*

Notice these words – they are the opposite of the old life we call reality.

So-called reality is perishable – it decays and self-destructs

It is defiled – broken--filled with wickedness, sin, evil, and greed

It is fading – oh, it seems bright and shiny and alluring and colorful like Candy Crush or a new pair of shoes – but it is superficial, temporary, fading away like a sunset.

## **Not so the inheritance the risen Lord Jesus shares with us!**

- It cannot be destroyed and will not self-destruct;
- It cannot be damaged or marred by the forces of death because they are no more.
- It will not fade because it is kept in the eternal glory of God, where the light never goes out and the beauty of God is always on display.

Sure, we can choose to cling to the baubles of this world, but they are like papier mâché in a downpour.

## **Jesus risen from the dead gives us a whole new way of seeing the world and of living in it.**

Not as those with no hope – **but as those who know there is everything to live for and hope for.**

*For we are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials...*

Haven't we though!

But this is precisely the occasion for faith in God who raised Jesus from the dead!

This is precisely the occasion for faith in Jesus who showed his wounds to Thomas so that he – and we – would know for certain that he was not some imposter.

This season of coronavirus pandemic is precisely the occasion for faith in the reality of life with God who wipes away tears, heals diseases, eradicates viruses, and raises the dead.

For though we, too, suffer during these trials and tribulations, we refuse to give up, *so that the genuineness of our faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*

Just as we practice good hygiene and social distancing for the sake of our neighbors – for one another – for the good of the whole global community – so, too, **we share this message of hope and faith for the sake of the whole world.**

**It is the message of Jesus risen from the dead that, when it goes viral, infects the world with saving grace.**

And the Gospel of Jesus Christ goes viral when Christians spread it.

*Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

The refrain of an old song said “They’ll know we are Christians by our love.” This is true.

But it is also true that the world will know us by our joy.

Not happy clappy fake joy, but the deep joy of knowing the presence of the risen Christ Jesus even during suffering, sorrow, and pain.

Such joy will not be swayed or weakened by the current crisis or its aftermath,

but will hold fast to the vision of the living Christ with the disciples – and will trust that those disciples are also us.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!