

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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Today doesn't much feel like Easter. That is, apart from our readings, songs, and shouts of Alleluias. But the gusto, the warm sun-drenched sanctuary, the familiar faces, the sounds of the organ—all that Easter good-ness seems more like a broken Alleluia. Yet, here we are. We're doing something together.

So, we distract ourselves with a story from Matthew's gospel. A story that begins with two women—in fact, it's probably two of the same women that Matthew named as watching Jesus take his final breath. The same two women who sat grieving outside the tomb the day Jesus died. It's these same women who walk towards the tomb that first Easter morning. And, then, all of the sudden, the earth shakes and suddenly the world is turned upside-down.

And, based on John's gospel, it's likely that the others are walled-up inside, isolated, cloistered away in a home with locked doors in fear for their safety. After all, they were still trying to figure out what to do. Their whole lives, every day, everything they were, everything they did, everywhere they went it was

all connected to Jesus. Their way of being was Jesus. Their “normal” way of living ended when Jesus died. Lucky for us, we have no connection to that experience. It’s just a story from a long time ago in a distant land. After all, do we really think anyone would lock themselves away out of fear?

You see, that first Easter morning was an odd one. There was no organ playing, there were no crowds, there wasn’t a champagne toast, and there were no candy-filled eggs. In fact, there was a CDC-approved gathering of two women who witnessed the *results* of the resurrection. They felt the impact of resurrection as the ground shook and they saw the empty tomb, but no one saw the resurrection. That’s because the resurrection didn’t take place in a bright, airy, sundrenched space. It didn’t smell of lilies or fresh bread. The resurrection happened within the lonely, isolating shadows.

And, darn it all, aren’t we in that moment? Doesn’t it just feel like the shadows are lengthening? Our incomes are restricting. Uncertainty is growing. And, we just need a resurrection. And that, my friends, is the exact moment in which resurrection happens. It’s in the dark, lonely, places. Because, as Dr. David Lose, puts it, “the Easter word of hope and courage came first to people who

did not take it for granted, [people] who were mired in isolation and fear, and [people] who could not imagine what life would now be like.”

And this year, together on this morning, we are stripped of our regular Easter trappings – the traditions and rituals that we hold dear for many good reasons – so, this Easter might just remind us that God has never promised that our worship services would always be grand, that our churches would overflow, that our economy will always be growing, that our health is guaranteed, or that our lives and future would unfold as we’d hoped and planned. God has never promised any of that, and anyone who tells you otherwise is a con. Rather, at the heart of the Gospel is the promise that God is both with us and for us at all times and through all conditions. In sorrow or joy, triumph or tragedy, gain or loss, peace or fear, scarcity or plenty, God is present.

And that is not some trite idea. Rather, it is a promise that we have discovered more clearly because of the cross. For, as Lutherans, we know for certain, that God meets us where we most need God, and that we often discover God in the least likely of places – whether in hardship, struggle, loss, or death. In the resurrection, God promises that all the harsh realities

of this life – hardship, struggle, loss, fear, disease, hunger, death – these realities – though painful they most certainly are – they do not have the last word. Rather the resurrection promises that God’s light is more powerful than darkness, that God’s love is stronger than hate, and that the life God offers through Christ prevails over all things, even death itself.

So, back at that tomb that first Easter morning, right after the women were literally shaken and more uncertain than ever before, those two women were told that Jesus was ahead of them. That Jesus was out in the world. And, more specifically, that Jesus was back at home in Galilee— back in the most familiar of places.

And, that is what I need to hear this Easter morning. I need to know that God is found in the most familiar of places—namely, my home. I need to hear that today’s odd Easter experience, is more similar to that first Easter than any Easter I’ve had in a church. Because, this Easter, this stay-at-home Easter, this new way of living has actually resurrected me. It has shown me how much I deeply love gathering together with you for worship. It has made me connect with people and family more frequently than I used to do. It’s made me appreciate the simple things in life—going for a walk,

taking a drive, and a haircut. I don't think I've appreciated grocery store clerks, food deliverers, janitors, and package deliverers more than I do now. And, after all the reading and studying and celebrating of Easter, I don't think I understood the Easter story, that I truly understood what that first Easter was like until today. And, I don't think I'm ever going to be the same after this experience. You see, sometimes resurrection is literally coming back to life, but sometimes resurrection is the new ways we think, feel, and approach the world. Sometimes new life is finding a way with a new normal. Sometimes, resurrection is about throwing aside old behaviors and fear. For me, I hope that my naivete, my blindness, and my individualism are the linens I leave in the grave. And, in the weeks ahead, I plan to be on the lookout for Christ ahead of me to discover God's presence right in front of me all along. Right there, in the people, the common places, and the everyday experiences.

So, as we journey into this unique season of Easter, I invite you to join me in keeping an eye out for God's presence in the overlooked, everyday places right in front of us –like, in your home and in the little things and, perhaps, even in the darkness. For, today might not feel like our expected Easter, but it's a lot like that first Easter. After all, no one said resurrection was pain-free

or easy, and resurrection often happens in those dark places. Yet, at the same time, today, more than ever, we have the resurrection of Christ among us. May we notice God's love among us, for Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed, Alleluia!