



## Easter Message

+ Bishop Jon V. Anderson

We listen to this weekend's lesson  
"with fear and great joy."

The theme of fear shows up in the Resurrection text from Matthew again and again. It keeps showing up in my life these days as well. Any of you wonder if you have a fever or cover a cough? A shiver of fear runs through your body as you release chemicals to prepare to flee, only there is nowhere to go to get away. I am afraid for my spouse, my children, my parent, my sibs, my team mates at work, our friends, pastors and people who we know and love...I am even afraid for strangers and enemies who don't deserve to face this. Each day, I encounter another story about the people who are serving in hospitals, ambulances, emergency rooms and all the other places where people are risking their lives to protect and sustain our lives. "Courage is fear that has said its prayers," someone once said.

Our normal denial of death is broken by this strange protein that can make our body go crazy, damage and even kill people. Our fear of dying is normally hidden below the surface of too many tasks, relationships or dreams but now our quiet nightmare is constantly being brought to mind by the stories that surround us these days.

We are personally afraid. We are communally afraid. Like a herd of animals, we clump up to connect or run like a terrified herd trying to get out of a burning movie theatre. Let's just say at the level of our individual choices and our communal choices, it is a constant wrestling match to keep our better angels in control of our spirit and lives.

In the church it is not much different. We have trouble keeping our eyes on Jesus and following him, because we are trying to save ourselves in some way or figure out the mystery of life and God, in the midst of this crucible of an experience.

My colleague, Pr. Stephen Cook talks about how it is an apocalypse. That word literally means an "unveiling." The truth about our life and our life together is getting unveiled. Things that seemed important before, now suddenly don't seem so important. Things that seemed unimportant are priceless. Our broken-ness always twisted into the weft and warp of life, now is easy to see. Our greediness shows up in odd but very transparent ways like grabbing more toilet paper than we need and hoarding things even if that takes things from our friends and neighbors in need. While it used to seem fine to miss worship and sharing the Word in proclamation, hymns and the meal, now we long to be able to gather and hear others sing when we are laboring and not quite sure how to find our voice or our way. We live "with fear" of our death and of our limits.

<sup>1</sup>After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.

<sup>4</sup>For **fear** of him the guards shook and became like dead men. <sup>5</sup>But the angel said to the women, "Do not be **afraid**; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. <sup>6</sup>He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. <sup>7</sup>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." <sup>8</sup>So they left the tomb quickly **with fear and great joy**, and ran to tell his disciples. <sup>9</sup>Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. <sup>10</sup>Then Jesus said to them, "**Do not be afraid**; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

- Matthew 28:1-10 - Day of the Resurrection

A disease hit our dairy herd when I was in seventh grade. It killed every animal under a year old in a week and a half. It killed half of our yearlings. It killed twenty percent of our cows and left another twenty percent ruined. We worked all day pulling dead animals out of our dairy and calf stanchion barns. When the vet opened the first and second dead animal, the lesions throughout the animals' digestive system made both the vet and my dad turn white as the disease's apocalypse opened their imagination to the danger and death we could not even imagine that day. It almost broke us all in more ways than money, but also our hearts and minds as fear turned into exhaustion.

The kicker was when we could not go to worship for Christmas eve because we did not want any of our neighbors to have this attack their herd. Not go to church for Christmas? You have got to be kidding. Christmas was going to be ruined, we thought. There were very few gifts. But in the way that God often works in surprising ways, I look back and remember that Christmas as the best Christmas of my life. No worship at church. No singing of hymns. Just a little Christmas play by the kids, hugs from my grandparents (who risked their herd to come), love from my parents, with the reading of the Christmas Gospel into a time of deep fear and uncertainty. It was good news.

I wonder how God will show up in the great three days to come. In the midst of this time of deep disruption, loneliness, threatened futures and fear of death we will gather and not gather. In the midst of fear that twists up our imagined future, our hearts and minds God will show up. I am not sure how and where, but I invite you to watch and listen and wonder how God is in our midst working to redeem this as God once found a way to redeem even the violence, torture and death of Jesus on the cross. God loves to take broken things and use them to move forward God's will and work. There is no God forsaken person, time or community. Listen for the angels, who look nothing like the angels of Hollywood. Messengers come to bring Good News that God has the power to overcome death.... all kinds of death. Even COVID-19 will not have the final word with any of us.

In our baptisms, God put the old broken one in us to death. We die each day as we return to the waters of baptism and God raises us to new life to sing our lives like a hymn of praise. God raises us from the little graves of our own or other's contamination. God forgives our failures to stay clean enough and profoundly destructive moments where anger comes out sideways. God loves each of us profoundly.

This week is about God's clearest statement that God is for us in the events of the passion. Jesus will teach us the Great Commandment to love. Christ Jesus knows about our fear and joins our lament, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken us." Jesus will be tortured and killed. And when it all seems like all is hopeless, lost and gone, Jesus was raised from the dead. No matter how we encounter this virus or all the other death dealing problems of life, we know in this weekend's story that God can and does overcome even the worst this world can throw at us.

May that great joy overcome your deepest fear. May God bless your journey through the coming days as you listen and hear the passion of Jesus in a new location and a deeper awareness of just how Good this news is for people like you and me.

Yes, God's Grace working in all this will somehow bring "great joy!"

*Read on to the third page, there are two images of crosses made up of words. These words are a collection of feelings throughout our synod. Each meeting Bp. Jon or the synod staff hosted they asked people to describe how they were feeling in one word. The colored cross is week one into the MN Stay at Home order, and the blue cross is week two.*



