

**Reflection: With Fear and Great Joy They Stayed Home?**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Risen Christ.  
Amen.

This is the day: when tears are wiped away, shattered hearts are mended, fears are replaced with joy. This is they day: when the Lord rolls away the stone of fear, throws off the clothes of death, goes ahead of us into God's future. This is the day the Lord has made: death has no fear for us, sin has lost its power over us, God opens the graves of our hearts to fill us with life. This is the day- Easter Day! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

I confess such joy is muted in this moment. To shout, "Christ is risen!" and know that the power of the message will hang in the air without the joyful response of God's people, "He is risen indeed! Alleluia!" And maybe for this day, for this Easter, I want the glorious message of the resurrection of Jesus to hang in the air and be carried on the wind. How else will others know the story of this world changing miracle without the power of creation to carry this message this day?

It is easy for Easter to be a joyful time after the deep reflection and discipline of Lent. A bright celebration of spring and new life after the cold, gray winter. But resurrection is so much more than that. Yes, there is joy – but this joy is so much more than the hearty laughter of a gathering of friends. Yes, there is new life – yet this life is so much more than the life bursting out of the ground in explosions of color. Resurrection is seen in the place of trauma – the deep, haunting wounds that we carry with us. This is where resurrection is seen as God moves to Easter within us as one poet writes. Resurrection never denies the pain and wounds of this life. There are no band-aids here to help us move-on. Resurrection is the truth of God living in us; the hope of God promising life to us; the joy of God overwhelming us.

We are Easter people. At the heart of every prayer for ourselves, the world, and the Church should be a hunger to see and recognize resurrection. But, of course, we doubt. We doubt because we cannot see. We doubt because we cannot touch. We doubt because we cannot believe that God's grace alone can bring us new life. And with our doubts comes the familiarity that the Good Fridays of our lives are what God desires for us. We can see the power of death when the light goes out from the eyes of someone we love. We can feel the power of death when a loved one has died and is now cool to the touch. We do not have to doubt the power of death, we can feel the power of death when the last breath is exhaled and the heart stops beating. And because we have known these Good Friday moments in our lives, we doubt the power and promise of the resurrection of Jesus and in our doubt of Jesus' resurrection – we doubt the promise God makes to each of us to bring resurrection to our life today.

Before the beginning of Lent, before Ash Wednesday, before quarantines and daily coronavirus briefings – I said goodbye to a woman named Pat. Pat was a woman who had taught herself everything. She was as independent as you can get. And when it came time for Pat to come to terms with the end of her life – she decided to hold on to that independence with every fiber of her being. And for awhile, Pat did exactly as she wanted. On her own terms – she decided what treatment; she decided who would tend; she decided how she would spend her last days. And in her last days – she kept her pastor at a distance – not yet, ready to come to terms with the end of her life. And so I waited – until her daughter called me and told me Pat had asked for me to come. And on a snowy afternoon, I sat by Pat's bed and read Scripture and prayed and then, at Pat's request, I sang.

*Lord prepare me to be a sanctuary, pure and holy, tried and true.  
With thanksgiving, I'll be a living, sanctuary for you.*

A reminder that God is always at work within us...making us, molding us, moving us into the most amazing creation – a divine reflection of God's self in each of us. What better way to prepare ourselves to meet our Savior, that to let us be reminded and renewed into the beautiful design of God's creation and

resurrection joy. And when our time together was coming to an end – in a moment of care for this beloved child of God – I sang these words...

*Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, let me stand, I am tired, I am weak, I am worn.  
Through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light.  
Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.*

And then with the sign of the cross on her forehead and the words, “Peace be with you,” I told Pat that I expected her homecoming, her resurrection to eternal life, to be filled with more joy than she could imagine, and I said goodbye.

I wonder if resurrection is too much, too confusing, that we would rather leave it until we face death. Having our ideas, our expectations, our whole way of life turned upside down is uncomfortable. Change – even for the better – can disturb, overwhelm, challenge us in ways we would not imagine.

Ponder for a moment, throughout these great days of Easter – where would you like to see resurrection: the truth of God living in us; the hope of God promising life to us; the joy of God overwhelming us. Where would you like to see resurrection? In your own life as you walk with an illness, struggle with disappointment, navigate a broken relationship – what would resurrection mean for you in such moments? I long to see resurrection for a friend who battles addiction. I long to see resurrection for a friend’s mom dying of cancer. I long to see resurrection in the journey of a friend who suffered a bitter divorce and continues still to suffer emotional abuse.

Where would you like to see resurrection? In our world as we struggle to see the dignity of each child of God who stands unwelcome at a border of one country or another, as weapons of war and mass casualty continue to be developed and produced, as resources are devoured, and creation continues to be abused without end? What would resurrection mean for our world in such moments? I long to see resurrection for parents seeking safety for their children. I long to see resurrection of God’s promised peace and an end to greed and selfish ambition at any cost. I long to see resurrection in the restoration of our planet – where value is found in the beauty of God’s design in every plant and animal and natural resources are preserved and protected.

I only need to name a few truths in need of God’s resurrection power to stir up the doubt within us. Resurrection is hard work. I think that is why God promises us to do the hard work of resurrection. And that resurrection work is exactly what God does on this Easter day. And to make sure we do not lose heart-to make sure we do not stay in our doubt-to invite us to let go of the Good Fridays of our lives-to convince us to trust in the promise and power of Jesus’ resurrection, God offers us the words of the angel at the empty tomb of Jesus. “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.”

Do not be afraid. Those words are just as important to us this day as they were on that first Easter morning. Do not be afraid! I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, he is risen, even as he said!

People of God, resurrection is at the heart of our faith: resurrection offers a word of truth to every aspect of our lives; resurrection speaks a word of hope to every broken moment in our lives; resurrection overwhelms with joy every doubt held in our hearts or whispered in suffering. Resurrection is God’s promise of life to every desperate heart afraid to believe they are worthy of love in this life. Resurrection is God’s promise of hope to every broken heart afraid to trust one more spoken word offering security. Resurrection is God’s promise of joy to every weary soul afraid to try just one more time.

Resurrection is God’s promise of life, eternal life, to each and every one of us. Calling us, claiming us, comforting us, challenging us to go into the world to tell the story of God’s great love. All the while reminding us: “Do not be afraid, the angel said, ‘he is not here, he is risen, even as he said!’” Amen.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.