

## A Different Kind of Easter

I can just imagine what that first Easter was like. Mary and Mary on the way to the grave together, hoping to finish properly embalming the body of Jesus. As they walked along, they probably were discussing the events of the previous few weeks. Jesus going away on another preaching journey... Lazarus getting ill, and Jesus too far away to heal his friend, leaving them in mourning... Jesus coming back to them too late, but then raising Lazarus... Jesus entry into Jerusalem... Oh! What an entry and welcome!... Jesus going to the Temple... How angry he got!

And then there was the Passover meal with his disciples. He washed all of their feet, even Peter who didn't want it... Then the bread and the wine after the meal... What did he mean by all that he said? ... His countenance as he went to the garden to pray... His arrest... and he put up no fight! Then finally the trial and his awful crucifixion. Now, the anxiety of who will roll the stone away.

The last few weeks have been tumultuous. First we heard of a virus, seemingly come from bats that were being used for food. Then it blew up on the other side of the world... Then a few cases showed up on the west coast. ... Flights began to be cancelled, we were told no more than fifty people should gather together. ... Then ten, ... then five. Restaurants, Bars, gyms, and our places of employment began to shut down. ... Then a "Stay Home" order was issued. ... Now thousands are dying!

Couldn't Jesus have saved us from all this? Why would God allow this, especially at a time when Jews traditionally gather to celebrate Passover and Christians celebrate Holy week, culminating with unusually crowded churches on Easter? I can see Jesus countenance as he moves to the garden to pray. ... But what was it He said to his disciples before he blessed and broke the bread?

In this time of social isolation, I have seen many posts on Facebook about how we shouldn't let Covid-19 keep us from going to church to worship. I have seen in the news the reports of pastors who refuse to cancel their "in person" worship gatherings, in spite of health warnings. I have even seen a pastor that was telling his flock that the love of Jesus was all they needed to protect them from the virus. I think God has a different plan. I think God may be using our need for social distancing to teach us what being the body of Christ really means.

Mary and Mary were the first to know that things were going to be V E R Y different going forward. Not just in the way things are different following a loved one's death, but in a radically new way: in a way no one had anticipated or had any experience with!

The familiar hymn “In the Garden” we assume is speaking of Mary and her encounter with the risen Christ in the garden outside the tomb, but the writer of the hymn never uses the name Mary. It is written using the first person singular: “I”. Each one of us may feel like we are alone with our fears, anxiety, frustrations, loneliness, and questions. Yet, in these times, if we are open to it, we can experience Jesus’ promise to never leave us alone.

More than that, I think we can look and see God’s care for us! Just look at the reports of the heroic efforts of the doctors, nurses, paramedics, nursing assistants, cleaning staffs, ... the list goes on and on. Look at the large number of individuals, that have turned this into a time to use their God-given gifts to benefit others. Cooks, preparing meals for hospital workers, students using 3-D printers to make face shields, sewers making masks and scrub caps, and don’t forget dads who are willing to look silly on camera doing dance routines with their daughters, or musicians performing at no charge for other’s happiness.

God is calling us out of our “dress-up and go to a celebratory worship” kind of Easter, and into an Easter celebration of what it means to be the resurrected body of Christ. The body that treats all its members with love, respect, and dignity. The body that never leaves ANYONE alone. The body that is yet discovering what the resurrection really means as we re-think what is truly important and necessary. The body, that when we can all come back together, will be so much stronger because we have re-discovered what it means to serve a risen savior in our day to day lives.

The churches may be empty this morning, but so was the tomb. He Is Risen Indeed!  
Allelujah!