

Since Easter is so important to the church every year, our Trustees met recently on a Zoom conference call and decided that they wanted a really special speaker for our video today. They said, “Why don’t we call the best preacher in the world and ask her to speak.” And they did, and she said “No.”

So they said, “Well, if we can’t have the best speaker, at least we can get the smartest one.” So they called her and she said “No.”

And then they said, “Well, if we can’t get the best or the smartest, at least we can get the best looking.” And they called her and she said, “No.”

And finally one of them said, “Well, we can always ask Pastor Vicky.” And so they did. And what could I say? I’d already told them “no” three times.

So sorry about that, you’re stuck with me this morning. But I’ve got to tell you, we’ve got a great topic, a great passage of scripture, and a great hope in our resurrected Lord.

Read Matthew 28:1-6.

Just recently, after a presidential news conference in the Rose Garden, a reporter made the observation that for the first time in our nation’s history, we won’t be celebrating Easter. Well let me tell you one thing—he’s wrong! We might not celebrate what Easter has become in that there may be no new clothes or patent leather shoes bought for today. We might not hide and hunt plastic Easter eggs in mass quantities. We may not be visiting with extended family today. We might not see some folks at our worship services that we haven’t seen since Christmas, but we’re going to celebrate Easter Sunday. Whether we’re here in our sanctuary or in our own homes, whatever way we assemble for worship, we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Pilate couldn’t kill Him and the grave couldn’t hold him. Do you think Coronavirus is going to stop Easter? I believe more people this year will hear the gospel than any other Easter before.

With COVID-19, no doubt this Easter will be different than any other we’ve experienced. Yet in the middle of all the changes, there are still some things that haven’t changed. This is still a day to celebrate the God who never changes. This building may be closed, but the tomb will still be empty. We may be sheltering in place, or quarantined, but our spirits cannot be quarantined. This terrible pandemic has taken the lives of many people, but love has not died.

Easter is not just about special programs. It’s not about trumpets or larger than normal crowds at church. It’s the fact that we serve a living Savior who is still transforming lives today. Easter is about the hope of tomorrow and the gift of everlasting life.

Yes indeed, we are celebrating! We will celebrate this message: the tomb is empty! Jesus Christ has conquered death. Good Friday wasn’t a period, wasn’t an exclamation point—it was only a comma. The story wasn’t finished: the battle wasn’t over! Jesus has the last word after all! Jesus has the victory! Jesus Christ is risen!

I was thinking about that first Easter and about our experience today with Covid-19, and I think there are actually some parallels. Two thousand years ago, there was a lot of confusion and grief.

It was definitely a time of struggle for followers of Jesus. Those disciples were frightened and “sheltering in place.” They were despairing and afraid. The future looked pretty bleak, and definitely unknown.

I believe Easter gives us a great comfort—great relief and support when our hearts are heavy. The risen Lord comes to us bringing comfort and hope. Jesus says the same thing to us that he said to his disciples in the upper room on Easter night: “Be at peace,” he said. “Don’t be afraid anymore.” It’s OK. I’m here with you.

Death thought it had the last word at Calvary, but as it turns out we have the last laugh.

James Moore is a Methodist minister who wrote about a delightful theater experience. On one of his vacations, he visited Stratford-on-Avon in England to see Shakespeare’s play *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. He said that the thing that made it such a memorable experience was that the play featured the distinguished actor Charles Laughton. Laughton played the role of Bottom, the comic character in the play.

Moore wrote: “In one scene, Bottom is supposed to die. Oh my goodness ... did Charles Laughton ever die! You thought that Laughton would never finish the death scene ... He really knew how to die! He went on and on. Finally, he was lying on stage with his chest and stomach heaving.” Moore said that everyone was gasping with the actor thinking, “Will he ever die?”

Finally Bottom died. The audience broke into applause. And do you know what Charles Laughton did? He got up and took a bow!”

How cool to have the “dead” actor get up and take a bow!

But that’s exactly what happened on that first Easter Sunday!

They crucified Jesus. They killed him, and yet Jesus stepped out of that tomb and took a bow! And because of the Resurrection of Jesus, we know as Christians that you and I will be able to do the same thing some day.

This is the good news of our faith, the great news of Easter. This is our comfort when things are tough and life is hard and our hearts are heavy—like right now!

At Calvary, evil had its best chance to defeat God and couldn’t do it. God won. That’s the joy of Easter. That’s the same power that rolled the stone away to show us the empty tomb. That’s the power that raised Jesus from the dead.

And that’s the same power that can give us strength for these hard times. Easter gives us the promise of God’s constant love and continuing presence with us no matter what happens in our lives.

Easter proves that God is never too busy to help us. God cares about you and me personally. God knows your name and mine. God knows our joys and sorrows, our defeats and victories, our agony and our ecstasy. God knows our prayers before we even pray them. God is nearer to us than breathing.

Friends, right now I know we feel afraid. This unseen little virus is taking the lives of young and old. It feels as though we could be knocked down at any moment. Some people feel as though we’re out here on our own. But WE ARE NOT. Easter proves that God loves us and that Jesus lives for us.

Let me close with the words of an old hymn "He Lives."

I serve a risen Savior. He's in the world today.

I know that he is living, whatever they may say.

I see his hand of mercy. I hear his voice of cheer.

And just the time I need him, he's always near.

He lives! He lives! Christ Jesus lives today.

He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way.

He lives! He lives! Salvation to impart.

You ask me how I know he lives? He lives within my heart.