

**“Out the Other Side”**

**Matthew 28:1-10**

**Pastor Andy Kinsey**

**Easter Sunday**

**April 12, 2020**

*“And Jesus told them, “Do not be afraid...go and tell others”*

- 28:10a

**Prayer of Preparation**

O risen Lord, on this Easter morning, no matter where we are, come to us and assure us of your holy presence: grant to us the gift of faith and the power of hope, in this life and in the life to come: Amen!

**Easter Message**

I was barely a year old when John Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. We were living in Tucson, Arizona at the time. Needless to say, I don't remember the day, other than what my parents said they were doing. Indeed, as I would learn, most folks could share where they were and what they were doing on that tragic day. For those who can remember: do you know where you were on that day?

Many of you may also remember where you were on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. I know we were living in Vincennes. It was an absolutely beautiful day. I was watching the *Today Show* when the first plane hit the Twin Towers. The memory is still very vivid. Do you remember?

Those events ushered in a national – if not international – trauma, a shock to our systems, the impact of which still lingers. They are events which prompt us to consider carefully what is happening.

But there are other kinds of events that can prompt us as well: for example, do you remember the moment of a child's birth or when you may have gotten a new job, or received good news about a family member? Or maybe you received a phone call that changed the course of your life and on the other side were blessings

you had not anticipated. All these feelings can bubble up from time to time, depending on the situation – joy, excitement.

I believe at this moment in time we all are experiencing trauma. We all are in the midst of a crisis that affects us at every level – personally, spiritually, economically. And yet, in the midst of this moment, we are also experiencing goodness, love, courage, even joy. We are discovering, as we have been sharing throughout Lent, who we truly are.

The questions we have been asking in terms of our own identity and mission as a congregation come into play here, and how we respond to what is taking place during this crisis says a great deal about the kind of people we are. It causes us to ask questions about what is truly important and about what faith really looks like.<sup>1</sup>

During Holy Week, I took some time to read the chapter on pandemics in Rodney Stark's book *The Rise of Christianity*. A professor of history, at Baylor University, Stark writes about how the early Christians sought to bring hope and charity to those who were suffering as a result of plagues and widespread illness. The early Christians had found ways of combating pandemics with wisdom and compassion and, by doing so, were able to show others the face of Christ.<sup>2</sup>

They were able to communicate to the wider world the very characteristics of the God they were worshipping and following: that God was very much involved with what was happening, not remote or distant; that God was very much working to redeem the world in spite of sickness; that unlike pagan gods, the God of Abraham was going to keep God's promises (Gen. 12:1-3, Deut. 38:6-8).<sup>3</sup>

The early Christians believed that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead was a reminder that God keeps God's promises, even in the bleakest of moments (Mt. 27:46); even during moments of crisis, God's engagement in this world is such that God will remain faithful (Lam. 3:23).

From the suffering of Good Friday, to the despair on Holy Saturday, to the dawn of Easter morning – there is the affirmation of how God is acting for our

---

<sup>1</sup> David Brooks, "Mental Health in the Age of the Coronavirus: The Struggle between Fear and Comfort," *The New York Times* (April 2, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 1996), 88-89.

<sup>3</sup>

I want to thank Bishop Graham Tomlin, Bishop of Kensington, for these insights.

good, seeking to bring us to a new place, on the other side of death and suffering. Just as God did in the Exodus. Just as God did in the Exile. Just as God does on Easter.

*The reason we can go through sin and death is because Jesus has been through sin and death: Jesus knows the way out because Jesus has been the way through.*<sup>4</sup>

When there is a destructive evil among us, seeking to undo the good of God's creation, God's raising Jesus from the dead is God's way of re-affirming the goodness of that creation (Col. 1:15-20) and reminding us that God will have the last word (Rev. 21:1-8).

### **Virus as Evil**

For as others have indicated over last few weeks, the coronavirus, or COVID-19, is an "enemy against humanity." Its affects point out the absence of what is truly good.<sup>5</sup>

And though I do not know a great deal about viruses, what I do know is that viruses are small pieces of genetic material gone wrong. That is to say, they cannot regulate themselves, but only replicate themselves by attaching themselves to healthy cells, and destroying them from the inside out. This is how they mutate or grow.

It is very much a picture of how evil works: viruses turn healthy cells inward to the point that all the other cells are no longer able to control themselves and fight off the virus.<sup>6</sup> It is as if all the healthy cells begin to turn on each other, rather than fighting a common enemy. And it's insidious – as all evil is.

But what makes this particular virus so difficult to combat is that we have to do two seemingly contradictory things at the same time: on the one hand, to combat it, we need to do something positive by showing kindness and compassion to others, reminding them that they are not alone; all the while, on the other hand, being wise by keeping distant from others.

---

<sup>4</sup> I appreciate Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, for these thoughts.

<sup>5</sup> See the article "WHO Chief Calls COVID-19 'Enemy Against Humanity'" at [www.cna.asia.com](http://www.cna.asia.com).

<sup>6</sup> Thanks to Bishop Graham Tomlin for these insights.

It's an irony, I know, but the way to defeat COVID-19 is not by turning inward against each other and thinking only of ourselves, but by doing acts of kindness, all the while doing them together by staying apart.

Do you remember Jesus teaching his disciples to be as wise as serpents and harmless as doves (Mt. 10:16)?

In a moment like this, we need to remember such a teaching: in other words, if we truly follow Jesus and what he is about, we will seek to do no harm, and in this case, by maintaining our distance from others; but we will do so as smart and creative people who still go about caring for others.<sup>7</sup>

I believe that this is why the resurrection of Jesus is not simply about mere survival on the one hand or some kind of bliss on the other. Rather, it is about the very concrete and practical and bodily ways God is making all things (2 Cor. 5:17), in this world and the world to come.<sup>8</sup>

It is about the way in which Jesus' crucified body has gone through death and come out the other side into a whole new way of life, into a whole new body.

I can't help but think that God is doing something similar with the church today: that on the other side of the pandemic the church will come out with a new kind of body – something we had not considered.

### **Matthew's Gospel and Christ's New Agenda for Ministry**

That's certainly the message we receive from Matthew's Gospel this morning: Matthew wants us to know that there is something earth-shattering about Easter and that on the other side is something new (28:2). Indeed, as Matthew tells it, there is a great deal of excitement on the first Easter: there is lightening and an angel descending from heaven (28:3). There are guards who are as dead and disciples full of fear (28:8).

But above all, there is an empty tomb (28:6), and there is a message that Jesus has *already* gone out in front of the church; he has already come out of the other side and gone to Galilee (28:7).

---

<sup>7</sup> See "Coronavirus Is Serious, But Panic Is Optional," *That Seems Important* at [www.thatseemsimportant.com](http://www.thatseemsimportant.com).

<sup>8</sup> N.T. Wright, *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 110; see also, N.T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone – Part Two* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox 2004), 198.

Put differently, Jesus is already setting a new agenda, an agenda that will involve us in ways we may not have anticipated (Matthew 28:16-20).

I am wondering how Christ's new agenda can guide us now.

By that I mean, when I consider the dashed hopes of Good Friday and the new hopes on Easter Sunday, I wonder how Christ has *already* gone before us.

For example, when I think of the seniors in both college and high school who probably won't go through graduation ceremonies, I wonder how Christ might want us to celebrate with them and remind them of what they have accomplished? How might we do that? Or how might we share with our teachers and professors what they have meant to us and how they are doing incredible work in the midst of the pandemic? Or with social workers and therapists, public officials and health care workers?

I am also thinking of families in our own congregation who have lost their jobs, or who are preparing for the arrival of a new baby.

What does Jesus' agenda of ministry look like *as he goes before us* and as he tells us to serve and tells others of the good news?

Let us know! For as I mentioned earlier, we are in the midst of trauma, and in the midst of trauma, it is easy to overlook something. It is why we need each other.

It is also why we need to be as harmless but as wise as possible, as we go about doing our work, *always hopeful, always joyful*.

After all, dear church, the tomb *is* empty. Jesus is not here. He *has* been raised.<sup>9</sup> And he goes before us. He has come out the other side and lives forever.

Amen.

---

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 28:6-7.

