

It's a Good Friday like none other. For God's family of faith the darkness we know well today is deepened in knowing that it will not be eased by the joy of family gathering in a few days. We are all in a fight for life – and we're not even sure how to do it, or how long it will last.

Grace and peace to you from Christ Jesus our Savior.

Jesus' death was a moment that changed everything. It provided deep insight for the Apostles into their humanness. Even after spending 3 intense years with Jesus, they realized they still knew so little about him or about God's ways. Even as Jesus dies, they are confined by their worldly knowledge – *they had seen death before* – they knew it was the end. And so, there was little thought as to how to continue. In fact we know from how the story unfolds that their first thoughts were fear and self-preservation!

But we also know, as the story unfolds, that God gradually, one step at a time, revealed that death is and *never has been* the victor. God is. And when it sunk in that the empty tomb was not the final word, everything changed for them.

We too are no strangers to death, suffering and grief. Today it is as if it lingers all around us like the stubborn snow that seems to not want to give way. Yet, if we are paying attention, we cannot dispute that spring is coming. Hope thaws our worries, soothes our grief, and unites us even when we are apart.

Today we are in solidarity with the suffering ones of the world. I remind you that there are many people who, even outside of COVID-19 implications, suffer in body, mind and spirit. I remind you that Creation is suffering from choking pollution. I remind you that injustice and violence are too much a part of everyday news. God asks us to step outside of our selfishness to answer these needs every day. I remind you that as God's people, we are bringers of hope and new life to despair. Stand the line. Not just for today or the next few months, but in the same persistent love that God has demonstrated for us.

This pandemic may change the ways we gather, it may evoke deep loneliness, worry, even anger. But it cannot steal away hope or the promise of God. Even in our darkest moments, we are not alone, but surrounded by a great cloud of witness from every time and place.

May you know that you are each upheld in this community of love.

May you be an agent of this love for others.  
And may you trust that love is always the final word.

Amen.