

Grace and Peace to you all from God our hope and our redeemer – Amen.

This Easter, for perhaps the first time in centuries, our churches will be as empty as Christ's tomb on that first resurrection morning.

Like Christ's disciples, many of us have spent the days following Good Friday - isolated, locked away in our houses, filled with grief over the loss of our family gatherings and maybe even some fear with the unknown realities of the world we are now living in.

And perhaps like Mary, and Mary Magdalene, who went at dawn to visit Jesus tomb, we too yearn for signs of hope, joy, and new life in the midst of these unimaginable days.

This Easter, of all Easters, we may just be learning something new about being a people of resurrection and hope, in the face of fear and death.

Maybe you, like I, have found yourself more connected to the scriptures of Holy Week this year. Whether it was Christ's new commandment to love one another as he first loved us, the words of forgiveness and grace Jesus shared from the cross, or the anticipation of journeying with the women in fear and great joy to find the empty tomb – these stories have stuck with me in new ways as I have experienced them this year.

And while I have heard, read, and studied these texts many times before – there is something about our present time that speaks to the depth of emotion these texts carry within their narratives. Profound feelings of grief, worry, and sadness. And yet also unbounding experiences of hope, love, and great joy.

This Easter – perhaps like never before we are being called to hold these holy states in tension as we grapple with the truth of our reality and that of Christ's resurrection during this pandemic. Truths that tell us that in this life, we will come to share in times of great grief, fear, loss, and even death. But truths that also tell us that in these moments, Christ walks with us – as our comfort and guide, proclaiming for us the greatest promise of our faith – that even in the midst of our hardest days we are still people of hope, peace, and new life.

Because Christ's resurrection is not only the promise of life after death – it is also the promise that the love and grace of God will always act to call us forth from the tombs that are threatening to close us in. Tombs that would have us believe that pain, sorrow, corruption, judgment, isolation, and death are all we are ever going to experience in this life.

Yet, God continues to come to us – rolling these grave stones away. Helping us to truly remember who we are, and whose we are, in the midst of our world today. Reminding us to hold all that we are and have come to experience in this life in a holy tension as we dare to trust that the God, who raised his son from death to new life, can and will also breathe new life within us and all of creation.

Just like the women who first went to the tomb - we are encouraged to remember and embrace the truth of our experiences here and now. A truth that would have us hold our holy fear and renewed joy hand in hand as we look for signs of the resurrection that are taking place all around us.

And so, while our churches will be empty this Easter - so will the tomb.

So, as people of resurrection and hope - this truth to everyone you meet. Share peace with those in the midst of their worry or despair over our world's great need. Bring renewal and life to those who have been isolated from community. Hold space for those who need to grieve. Passionately spread signs of hope, joy, and new life with abandon in the midst of these days. And as you, by word or deed, you will proclaim:

That Christ is risen - *Christ is risen indeed - Alleluia!*

May this be so among us - Amen.