

Protect us, O God, for we take refuge in you. You are our Lord, our good above all other.
Psalm 16:1

Here I am again this week in an empty church. I suppose I'm getting used to this new normal. Christine and I are getting our cues down better week by week, and Keen is loving the fact that he can come and be in the church with me on a "Sunday" morning. I sure do miss you all though. And so when I'm preaching to empty pews like now, I picture you here. I know where many of you usually sit on Sunday, and I hope for a time when I will see people in pews again. And for all you who have come to Trinity occasionally, or haven't been to the physical church at all, I hope to see you once we can gather once again. We'd all really like to just get back to our old routines.

But instead we live in a new world. Many things in our lives have changed....and so it was with the disciples. Nothing was the same for them as they gathered in that locked upper room afraid of the crowds and the authorities, and isolating to keep out of danger. Hmmm. Sounds a bit familiar doesn't it. They had each other though, except for Thomas who was out elsewhere when Jesus made his first appearance in that locked upper room. Jesus startled them all by coming to them and telling them to **be at peace**.

The disciples had thought that the life they had with Jesus: their friend, and rabbi and savior was over. God HAD sent his son, Jesus, to them, but it must have been just temporary, like an important prophet who has a message from God, but then dies and is gone. The joy of following Jesus in the countryside was over. Sure, he had given them tools for their own ministry.

Remember when Jesus sent them out two by two with no belt, no purse and only one pair of sandals. They had been through ministry boot camp. But I know what that would feel like for me; if the person who connected me to God, the one that inspired me, filled me with purpose and inspiration was gone, and died as any human being would. I think for me it would be very hard to want to continue the ministry. I can understand that they were deep in grief.

But Jesus **did** return in a very different way. He rose from the dead. Jesus **did** continue to inspire and give peace and purpose to life. That is what Peter attests to when he gives his sermon that we heard in the first reading this morning that Tom read for us. Filled with the Spirit the once frightened disciples came out of hiding and got back to work sharing their experiences of the living Christ with everyone and reminding them that Jesus had fulfilled the prophecies of the ancient scriptures too.

Well, that's how it is for us now. We have been given our training for mission too; from our baptism, our learnings, discussions and our own life experiences of Jesus. We have been prepared for just such an Easter. It's time to dust off the tools that may be a bit rusty, and get to work. We

may find ourselves in a room alone and isolated, and yet Jesus comes to us through any doors and across any distances and says to you and me, **“Peace be with you.”**

Martin Luther was confronted in his day with a pandemic, the bubonic plague.

The year was 1527 – fifteen years into the Reformation and the plague came to Wittenberg. People who cared about him urged Luther to flee the city. But he didn't. He felt that he was called to stay and work. And he wrote a letter in response to his fellow pastor, Johann Hess in Breslau. He gave a lot practical advice about being safe and helping neighbors, about protecting the weak and helping people flee the city who were most at risk. And he reminded his colleague that

“Our prayer is not that God should remove us from times of disaster and death but to give us peace in the middle of disaster and death. Christ has already overcome these things and through faith we will too.”

I have to admit to all of you that although my head knows that we are still deep in the season of COVID-19 and must maintain our distancing and handwashing, there's a corner of my heart in which I feel like this should all be over now, because it's Easter. It was a fine Lenten practice to be alone more of the time, to pray and to not go to movies and restaurants. But it's not Lent anymore, my heart says. I shared this with a Diocesan friend, Alli Gannett. Some of you remember her when we celebrated the Eucharist at the Iron Bridge in Falls Village when Alli was walking the Appalachian Trail. She said, “You're right, Heidi, this was the Lentiest Lent we ever Lented!”

But it isn't Lent anymore. It is Easter. Its an Easter in which we face dire circumstances AND we live in resurrection faith. Our Easter faith reminds us every day of how we are brought back to life by the Messiah who died and rose again. In Christ there is life. And we all are finding ways to be alive this season, and help others see resurrection life too. And all the while staying safe and helping others to be safe too.

Remember Peter's words in his letter that Theresa read today:

Even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith – being more precious than gold, that though perishable, is tested by fire---may be found to result in prayers and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 1 Peter 1:8