

Easter 2020
Christ Church Cathedral
During Isolation and Pandemic
The Rt. Rev. C. Andrew Doyle

I do not know what the followers of Jesus, the women at the tomb, the disciples, the two on the road to Emmaus, the eleven gathered in the upper room, and those fishing by the seaside, thought was going to happen. Yet, I do not think they expected resurrection.

I do believe they doubted that God could do a new thing. I don't suppose they could believe their eyes. And, while they knew God had raised the widow of Zarephath's son, the son of the Shunammite Woman, the man from Israel raised out of Elisha's tomb, the widow of Nain's son, Jairus' Daughter, and Lazarus, I suppose they were surprised to see that Mary's son Jesus was resurrected. Resurrection from the dead happened- and happens. By every account they were surprised.

Perhaps in these last days we have been surprised to find God in our lives and in our homes. Maybe we have been surprised too that God can do a new thing in our time. Into a COVID, Coronavirus Isolation, the Lenten lessons disrupted us, came to us, taught us, and surprised us like a woman at the well.

We discover living water flows through new technologies and old forms of worship. We have lived through a time when we have not worshiped God on a mountain or in a temple. Like a man born blind we see again God's presence in the world, and in our households amidst our family. We can hear God speak to us when we are alone for the stillness of it all. Now, in touch with the struggle of shut-ins and those who cannot get to worship most Sundays due to work or health.

We as a church have awoken to new causes, new ways of gathering, and new ways of ministering - old ways too, like the phone tree. We come to understand church is for all people, not just those who can make it in person, all of which are thoughts and manners we should carry with us out of isolation.

Surprisingly, after a few short weeks, like Lazarus, our desire for the Eucharist has been resurrected, no longer taken for granted. Our longing to be together, and in relationship with one another has a renewed beating heart. And today we discover again the power of the living word, that Christ is Resurrected.

It is indeed Easter Sunday. It is Easter! Wherever you find yourself, we have given up cup and bread as a fast for the world to do our part in healing A virus-stricken planet, a cruciform act. And from this sacrifice, this new experience of Easter, the Church in exile from its buildings (in order to save thousands of lives) has taken up worship of the Risen Christ from our homes amongst the virtually gathered out of the veracity in our austerity. On this day we have gathered in all manner of dress, huddled around screens singing Easter hymns and proclaiming the resurrected Christ.

Easter comes. It comes even if emperors of old said it could not. It comes as persecution kept Christians huddled in catacombs. It comes in the midst of plague and famine. It comes when mighty armies battled in fields and families hid in basements. It comes to a worker in a Gulag in Murmansk, as it came to a hostage in solitary imprisonment for 1,700 days. It comes. Easter cannot be stopped because resurrection a long time ago on that first Easter Day, like a seed, laid in the ground for three days and spread its mighty roots into the deep earth bringing life from death. Nothing can stop Easter from coming.

Perhaps Easter celebrated this way is a puzzle to those who think Easter is about them and their routines and the context of their story, especially those outside our tradition (and inside for that matter), who believe that Easter is about going to church. Easter lilies, hats, and eggs. It is a puzzle to those who believe it is a mere ritual of (what one might call) epic altar guild proportions.

Easter comes while we are at home. It comes with or without egg hunts and deviled eggs. It comes with or without peeps. It comes without bonnets and new suits. It comes if we are at home alone or if we have a few loved ones gathered near. A surprise to us is the realization, an inflection point, in which we see clearly that God has not been invited into our story. No, on Easter we are invited into God's story.

We join faith Ancestors going back 6,000 years who proclaimed wherever they may have been that God is present. God frees the enslaved. God feeds those in the wilderness with manna. God heals the sick. God gives sight to the blind and God raises the dead forever and evermore. In deserts, on the road, in homes, by the sea and at tombs- we have inherited and now we experience- the very real understanding that one cannot hold back a God who resurrects.

God tramples down death in all its forms all the time. In every time we see the life, the ministry, the death and resurrection of Christ as a whole as an "autobasileia," (A word coined by the ancient Christian theologian Origen)

We see Christ (if you will) as Imprimatur, the best vision of the church, "the kingdom God in one person." Christ is resurrected. The church is resurrected. Today, we are re-given (in Isaiah the prophet's words) "Tongues of teachers to sustain the weary with a word."

We have been given a good word, a vision of the kingdom of God in the resurrected person of Christ, a vision of the church manifest to the world, in the world, for the world. For if Easter Comes on this day for us at home to the family, to the couple, the individual, the widow and widower, if it comes to us as we say the prayers around our tables and our screens, then just assuredly does it come for others.

We have a good word for the weary world, for the sick, for those who seek to heal, to those who care, to those who sit with the dying. A good word to the fearful and anxious even in a time of pandemic, of physical isolation from one another- even in this time of the coronavirus.

God tramples down death. The good news of Easter and resurrection comes to those in China and Italy. It comes to those in New York and it comes to those in New Jersey, Michigan and California. It comes as our priests pray with the dying via facetime, skype and telephone. It comes to the families who have lost loved ones due to the virus, clergy families and parishioners. It comes by the graveside with only a few gathered because of CDC guidelines. It comes to the doctors and nurses on COVID teams that we have prayed with and pray for. Even to us.

Wherever we may be right now, it comes. Easter comes. Resurrection comes. And by now, it shouldn't be a surprise but it is...