

Easter Sermon

Grace, mercy and peace from God our father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

First off, a very blessed Easter to all in our Redeemer family, and to those in our wider community of friends who may be tuning in this morning. ON behalf of the staff of Redeemer, and our church council, I wish you all health, patience and hope.

I also want to extend a great thank you to members of Redeemer for your support to me and the staff, for your prayers and encouragement. You have proven the truth of one of the core values we discovered about ourselves last year, that Redeemer sees itself as a family of faith, and that love and support that befits a family has been shared by you with us. We are truly grateful. I wish to personally thank our staff, Diane McGregor, Stephanie Doyle, and Fran Morton, for rising to the occasion under these circumstances, and for working so well under great pressure to continue our outreach to you at home.

I also want to thank the lay leadership of Redeemer, our Church Council, for their focus, attention, and faithfulness in working to meet the needs of a congregation that cannot meet together, cannot worship together, and cannot work together. We are blessed to see in all kinds of ways the faithfulness and vision of our members, who are working hard as essential workers through this pandemic, who are health and educational professionals, who are making donations, pulling together supplies, making masks for hospital staff, organizing meals for the needy in town. Redeemer members are rising to meet the challenge of our time, and I thank you all for your work and faith.

This Easter holiday is indeed surreal. It doesn't feel like the Easter holiday that I'm used to. For me, Easter Sunday is always the summit of a long season of preparation that began several weeks ago on Ash Wednesday. The season of Lent brings us into this Holy Week, and then the sacred three days of the Triduum, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil. After this long run of preparation, organization, planning and performance, Easter Sunday is that long awaited exhale, when the work of our spiritual journey finds release in true joy for the gift of faith, of church family, and hope for our lives and the fate of the world.

For Redeemer, and for those who know our Easter traditions, we would also have had our Easter Sunrise service at Redeemer Cemetery this morning, which many people, both members and non-members enjoy and find meaningful. Then for me, the joy of Easter meets the satisfaction of our work completed, for a nice coffee hour after the 10:30 service, and then for my personal indulgence, buffet lunch at Shannon Rose restaurant, where I sit down to a tall pint of freshly drawn Guinness Stout, and enjoy some shepherd's pie or bangers and mash. That's my Easter, and I know you have yours. Throw in pictures with the family, the new clothes bought just in time because the kids have outgrown their dress clothes, and lunch or dinner with family, and add the smell of Spring to the day, and you have the perfect Spring time holiday, filled with hope, new life, and maybe even a nap later in the day!

But what has happened to our Easter this year? The coronavirus has swallowed our festival day, and has left us with a sort of extended working stay-cation, with no clear end in sight, where every day is a lot like any other day, including holidays.

We will come through this time and these challenges
Your family will come through this time of challenge. Our community will come through this time of challenge, our country will come through this time of challenge, the world will too. But we will be changed by this experience as well. We can't anticipate all the changes, but what we do instead is focus on the basics. For starters, people basically mean well, and for the most part, want no suffering for others, but only life, health and happiness. Secondly, we must continue to be good to ourselves and to each other in this challenging situation, to practice patience and give ourselves the benefit of the doubt, and then practice this same compassion and forbearance with other people in the world around us. But third, and this is for Christians in particular, we must grab hold of our faith in this challenging time, and grab hold of the cross of Jesus, and profess our hope in his resurrection power.

For a while to come, perhaps for a long while to come, we will feel sometimes like we are on the verge of panic, or critical anxiety, or fear for our lives, for our dreams, for the world we live in. We are amazed at the stealth of this pandemic, the way it seems to strike down those whose health is compromised, but then it turns and kills those who are young and hearty. It seems capricious, giving some a

bad cold, while grinding others through pneumonia into death. It's hard to make sense of this disease. Stress and worry will crowd out satisfaction and joy. We will worry for the state of the world we live in, we will experience fear for our well-being, whether financial or physical. For those of us who have not been much affected, we worry what the virus will change everything right out from under our feet. For those who have been struck in health, we worry how it will play out. For those who have lost money, livelihood, or their job, we worry how we will ever recover. And then there are the reports of show us how the virus and its effects exacerbate the inequalities that we have been grappling with in our society for generations. We can't yet count the number of reckonings we will face when this is all over.

When these feelings arise, we will have to talk to ourselves in the wisdom of the Lord, and we must talk to each other, and calm these fears with wisdom that comes from our faith in God. Wisdom knows that there are reserves of resilience that we may doubt we have, but which come to us in time of need. Our children write these truths in chalk on our sidewalks, "you can do this!" It's the echo of our ancestors who survived worse, or those like my great grandfather who died in the flu epidemic of 1918. They speak to us through the ages, You can do this.

Wisdom knows these things, and helps Christians remain strong in the faith, especially when the challenges come. Christians especially, need not become defensive in the face of society's failures. Christians have known all along that government is not our savior. But Christians will continue to advocate all the more for learning from our mistakes and pushing for fair and just treatment and greater protection of those who are neediest or most disadvantaged. Christians especially, need not fear for our livelihood, for whether we lose a little, or lose it all, God is with us, our community will help, and our faith in God will prove to be the most valuable asset we possess. But Christians will continue to push for greater respect for animals and the food supply we depend on, and overall care for God's creation. We all will forever practice better hygiene, but Christians will advocate all the more strongly for faster development of renewable energy, and for greater respect for animals and wildlife. For the reckoning that is coming includes the suspicion that if not for the tons of antibiotics we pump into the animals we eat, this epidemic could just as easily have started on a chicken farm in Iowa, instead of a wild animal market in China. And we know, give a virus

enough time and unnatural conditions to work in, and it will make mincemeat of our medical cures.

But finally, Christians especially, need not fear death, for we have been joined to the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul says in the 8th chapter of his letter to the Romans,

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?...

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,[k] neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Christians believe in the power of God over death. We believe that God has been showing his saving grace to every generation in the history of his people, but that especially in Christ, God finally conquered death once and for all. Now we count ourselves fortunate to live in the time of faith in this promise. But Christians, especially, will continue to advocate against human cultures of death dealing, of unregulated capital run amuck, of systems that cynically run on survival of the fittest. Christians will continue to protest cultures of permanent war, of proxy wars, of systems of unequal education, health care, incarceration, or you know, all the usual suspects that make our world a living hell for many and a pretty nice utopia for a few. Christians will not blame poverty or disadvantage on the moral character of those who are poor. Christians will continue to read the science, study the research and listen to experts who show us what our death dealing systems actually make of the world we live in, and we will continue to lift the cross of Christ high, as God’s final judgement against the death and death dealing that thrive in our world.

Christ didn’t die for nothing, and he wasn’t raised from the dead for show. The church in every generation must wrap its mind around this truth. The church is called in baptism to live as if Christ is perpetually handing over his body to death through the church’s witness, and the church will always be vindicated because God keeps raising it up its witness from the ashes. You are that church, dear friends. Your lives are that witness, and your death whenever and however it

comes, will be to his glory, so that God's love for the world may be proven in the promises he keeps. For as Paul writes, when Christ who is your life is revealed, then you will be revealed with him in Glory.

So dear friends, give thanks to God, in sickness, in health, in good fortune or bad, count yourselves among the saints, for you are saints not by virtue of your works, but by virtue of God's grace. Live out Easter in your daily life, even as you humble yourselves before the suffering of others. Encourage one another, pray for each other, love one another as Christ your lord has loved you, and may the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.