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**Easter Day 2020, Year A (RCL)**  
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**St. Peter's Episcopal Church, Arlington, VA**  
**April 12, 2020**

Happy Easter! Today we celebrate the day on which God resurrected the crucified Jesus from the dead. That's why we wish one another a Happy Easter! The resurrection of Jesus is an event that forever changed the course of history and one that still changes lives today.

This year we are celebrating Easter in way that is totally different from the ways we have celebrated Easter in the past. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, we are celebrating Easter together yet apart. Thanks to current technology, we have the ability to worship together in a myriad of separate places. We are celebrating Easter alone and yet together. There are only a very few of us here in the physical building of St. Peter's Episcopal Church this morning, but we are over-joyed that you are joining us from home or wherever you are, in our Easter celebration here at St. Peter's. Our worship is being live-streamed to you, but due to the need to keep the number of people to a minimum in the church building, we pre-recorded the music that will accompany the live-streaming of our worship service this morning.

"Welcome, Happy Morning!" begins one of our most famous Easter Hymns. It is a "Happy Morning" from the grand perspective of our Christian faith. Many, however, find it difficult, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, to be happy in their current circumstances. Our health workers are risking their lives to be present and to care for those who now are sick and for those who may become sick. Essential workers find themselves in similar situations of risk and worry. And with stay-at-home orders mandated to help "flatten the curve" of infection and to protect the most vulnerable among us, many feel isolated, trapped and discouraged. As we extend our corporate gratitude to these people, please remember to keep all of these people in your prayers. At this time some of us, or some people we know, have lost their employment and are facing new hardships. Please let us know here at the church if we can assist you during this time. We want to be here to help you.

Our Easter celebrations, as you can see, take place this year in the context of loss, worry, anxiety, danger, hardship, and discouragement, even depression.

While the Easter story is a story of victory and triumph, it also takes place in an anxious and troubled setting that should not be unfamiliar to us. After the arrest of Jesus, the disciples seem to have fled and gone into hiding. Peter was so afraid that after the arrest of Jesus, he denied that he even knew Jesus. The male disciples are nowhere to be seen on Good Friday as Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried. Confused and dejected and in fear of their lives, they went into hiding. They are troubled, alone, and anxious. Does that sound familiar?

On that first Easter morning, the Gospel of Matthew tells us, two women—Mary Magdalene and the other unnamed Mary — went to Jesus’s tomb. They expected to find Jesus in his tomb, but their expectations were overturned in three ways: First, the tomb was not closed by the large stone, that had been placed over the opening to seal it after the body of Jesus had been put in the tomb. Second, they discover that the body of Jesus was not there. Rather, the women are greeted by an angel, a messenger of God, who tells them the glad Easter tidings: “Do not be afraid. He is not here but he has been raised [from the dead]. Third, when they find Jesus, he is not dead, but he is alive. Jesus, like the angel that preceded him, tells the women not to be afraid, and he sends the women off to tell the disciples that they are to go to Galilee where they once again will see their risen Lord.

So, you see, there is a lot of confusion and anxiety on that first Easter morning, Mary does not immediately recognize what is happening. She is troubled and uncertain until she is greeted by the angel who assures her that the Jesus she loves is alive. Peter and all the other disciples who disappeared from the scene after Jesus’ arrest, are dejected, confused, afraid, and in hiding.

The glad tidings of the resurrection of Jesus comes to people, like us, who may be dejected, confused, and afraid. With that good, happy news, we like the women who arrive at the tomb, are told not to be afraid. Jesus has not left them. He is still with them. He is alive. He lives! “Alleluia, Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed!”

If we fast forward the story in the Gospel of Matthew a bit, when the disciples meet the resurrected Jesus in Galilee, as Jesus had asked them to do, they are

given the Great Commission along with a promise: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt. 28:19–20 NRSV). With what we call the Great Commission the disciples are given the task of sharing the good news of Jesus resurrection and what Jesus had taught them with all the people of the world. They are given a task to perform and a promise that will sustain them as they obey Jesus. The promise that accompanies the task is a promise given not only to the disciples, but to all of us as well, “Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Jesus lives! Jesus is alive! Jesus is still with us! Even in the most uncertain of times, Jesus promises to be with us always. Jesus is with you wherever you are. We are never totally alone. In the words of the famous Easter hymn, He lives, he lives, Christ Jesus lives today!” Jesus is with you wherever you are and in whatever circumstance you find yourself. Hear the words of Jesus, “Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

The four gospels tell of other events that happened that first Easter Day. That evening, the writer of the gospel of John tells us, the disciples met behind closed and locked doors, because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities. They were afraid that what happened to Jesus, might happen to them. They also might be arrested and put to death. And so, they met in fear and in secret. The doors were locked but the body of resurrected Jesus moving through walls and locked doors, appeared in the midst of them and said, “Peace be with you.”

I’d like us to think about this story in the context of the current pandemic. Those of us who are regarded as non-essential workers are staying home. We are locked, as it were, in our homes not because we are in fear of arrest but in fear of contracting the disease and protect one another. As I mentioned before, others including medical workers, emergency response personnel, grocery store workers, and other essential workers —are also facing danger to their own health and are worried about the health of their family members with whom they are in daily contact. Jesus is with us. He has not left us alone. Jesus, through the power of the resurrection, is with all of us— always. Jesus lives! He is with us now. He has never left us. He will never leave us.

Jesus who moved through walls and locked doors still does that today. Jesus still comes through locked doors and the walls that surround us. His words to the women, "Do not be afraid," are words we also need to hear today. "Do not be afraid," ... "Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

In this time, when it's so easy for us to be full of fear and anxiety, we need to do what we can to support one another until such time as we are together again in person.

On this Easter Sunday, let us celebrate the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. "Welcome, Happy Morning! Jesus is risen! Jesus is alive! He lives! He lives! Christ Jesus lives today. And let us look forward to the day when we can celebrate the resurrection of Jesus together in person in our church building once again.

*Let us pray:*

Lord Jesus, we pray today that you will come to us in all our anxiety and uncertainty, our sorrows and despair, and in our loneliness and isolation. Come through the walls and doors that separate us from one another and from you. Help us not to be afraid but to trust in your goodness and love. We know that you are always with us, so lift our weary hearts so that we might give you praise. Be with us as you promised your disciples so long ago in Galilee, now and always, even "to the end of the age." Amen.

Hear the words of our Savior Jesus Christ, "Do not be afraid," ... "Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

*Amen.*