

Easter feels super weird this year. It's weird for me to proclaim that the tomb is indeed empty to an empty sanctuary. It's weird that we won't be able to gather today for breakfast and see our extended families in person, both biological and church family. It's weird that we haven't been able to participate in lots of our normal traditions, and that the celebrations we are having are much smaller, with at least one virtual element (hello, good people watching this video).

But I am convinced that Easter this year feels about as close to the first Easter as we can get. The very first Easter saw the people who loved and followed Jesus huddled behind locked doors out of fear and for their own protection from the people around them. The societal situation that arose after Jesus' crucifixion was a tense one, one filled with fear and uncertainty and people really having no idea what to do or expect in their unprecedented time. People named that truly, Jesus was God's Son and learned that truth only in his death, and now had no idea what to do about the repercussions of killing the Son of God. The followers of Jesus, for their own additional protection, were gathered in small groups and dispersed around the area.

The people who bravely went out to check on Jesus were the caretakers, these powerful women who kept the tangible parts of everyday life going. These women who out of love and care for their Savior, were the very first people to know that Jesus was risen, the life-saving Good News for us all, and proclaim the news to the people around them. Jesus appeared to the women who were brave enough to bear the extremely challenging circumstances in which they all found themselves, and physically tend to him in both his dying and rising again.

And on this entirely new and different and a little bit weird Easter morning, where do we find ourselves? We too are all staying safe and protecting ourselves by staying in our homes, gathered only in groups of a couple of people with whom we live, dispersed around the area and maintaining

social distance even when we find ourselves in the essential gathering places for our survival.

We too have an underlying current of fear, anxiety, and concern about the unknown nature of the world around us. We are living in an unprecedented situation for all of us who are currently living - none of us have experienced a pandemic on this global scale or had to completely and entirely, communally adjust our lives in a very short amount of time.

And we are only going out for essential services and for essential jobs, mustering up our bravery and personal protective gear, and caretaking the people and society around us. We are leaning on the bravery and necessity of folks doing the work of keeping us alive - healthcare workers, grocery and pharmacy workers, delivery folks, emergency services, and all the people we lean on on a daily basis to keep our families well-learned, well-cared for, and well-informed. The people, often women and people in lower-income jobs, who work in necessary helping professions, are the ones who bring powerful hope in healing and keeping us alive.

We can love and respect and miss the traditions that make up our sense of normal on Easter - they are rooted in the ways we know to celebrate, in what is familiar to us, and that's a good thing.

But our saving, our resurrection hope as the body of Christ, the grace and love and life of Easter morning, is not contingent on these traditions.

Let us take radical comfort in the fact that we do not need to meet certain conditions to proclaim Jesus' rising. We do not need to hold fast to tradition in order to truly know Jesus rose from the dead. Our hope is not in the fun activities or the absolute splendor and glory of what Easter normally feels like as we celebrate in our specific time and place.

Our hope is in Jesus Christ who is risen today. Our hope is in the new life that defeated the power of the grave and rolled the stone away from the tomb of darkness and suffering. Our hope is in God who created us, loves us, will never leave us, and shows us this love through Jesus Christ in the

power of the Holy Spirit. Our hope is in the risen Jesus Christ who forgives all our sins, casts away all darkness with His light, and is truly the way, the truth, and the life for all the world.

The hope that is so miraculously given to us on this Easter morning is the kind of powerful hope that saves people's lives. This is the deep kind of hope that has been the tenet, the pillar of Christian faith, communities, leaders, martyrs, and faithful people for thousands of years, the deepest kind of life that is found in our spirits when everything else is unmanageable. This is the hope that empowers people to do radical things for the love of one another by the gifts given to us by the Holy Spirit. This hope we find in Jesus is the liferaft to which we must hang on when we are drowning in the storms of our lives, mentally, emotionally, physically, situationally, any way that we feel in our human experience. The hope in Jesus Christ is the light that shines in every single darkness that threatens us and that darkness will always be overcome. The light will always shine forth. The new life will always rise. The tomb will always be empty, Hallelujah!

Even though Easter feels different right now, the hope and the life in Jesus Christ is ever the same. Where there is life, there is hope. Jesus shows this to us as his risen new life gave hope to all those people dispersed and huddled behind locked doors and overcome with fear. There is hope to be found in the life of Jesus and the life that is given to us abundantly. Truly there is hope to be found in any and all situations, the gritty kind of hope that gets down into what's real and vulnerable and scary and leads people to be free from what holds them captive and proclaim the life-saving Good News of new life in Jesus Christ.

Let's be comforted and empowered by this proclamation, that Jesus is still risen for the love and grace and life of all people. Though we may grieve the past traditions, the plans we may have made for this year, the life that was normal for us before this pandemic, Jesus still brings us new life in the

midst of this grief. After all, it is to a grieving people that he first revealed his miraculous, risen body. In the midst of all this difference, hope has not changed. The resurrection is still happening. We are given the life-saving promises of new life in Christ. Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord is risen. He is risen indeed, Alleluia! Amen.