

Hallelujah Christ is risen!!

Dear friends, what a joy it is to preach and worship with you on this beautiful Easter morning. Admittedly, it is a bit weird to proclaim the empty tomb to an empty sanctuary for the second year in a row, but friends, today and in this season, we are filled with a new hope. A hope that's new and powerful and brighter than it was a year ago. A hope that is indeed as mighty and as much of a gift as life itself.

This is the year where we experience hope in our bodies like we never have before, and that connects us deeply to the life-saving hope that the disciples and women found at the empty tomb of Jesus so many years ago. It is, after all, the rising of Christ in his physical body that provided the miracle of resurrection. We too experience hope and resurrection in our bodies, deeply connected to our minds and spirits, especially in this season of the pandemic slowly ending, but the foundation of it all is Jesus' risen body from that tomb and into the promises of new life. We are a resurrection, Easter people, and the resurrection is a body.

We've become more aware than ever of our bodies over this past year - how many feet of distance are between my body and the next person's? How snugly is this mask fitting on my face? How many times can I wash my hands before they crack and get scaly? How long has it been since I hugged this person I love? How much can I protect myself from a virus that has killed so many?

This intense level of awareness also makes the incredible gift of the COVID vaccine that much more powerful. It is by the gift of science and modern discovery that we are able to slowly but surely return to a sense of safety within our bodies and greater world. The hope of life after the pandemic is deeply related to our bodies' capability of fighting and minimizing the spread of the virus with the vaccine.

And though we are still in a time of distance, the time is coming, dear friends, when we will be able to gather again. The hope that resides in our

bodies is real and true and thanks be to God for the unique way that hope truly saves our lives. It is tough to miss out on some of 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 activities or the absolute splendor 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 risen body of Jesus that shattered every expectation of that tomb and gives us hope in our own bodies, lived human experiences too. 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 again this year, 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 unsure and overcome with fear. Indeed the women who were the first witnesses to the risen Jesus were so afraid they initially said nothing! But it is ultimately because of their testimony, their perseverance in an unprecedented time of both fear and hope that the Gospel message was spread and is still here for us today. Thanks be to God for the courage of these women who did not let fear defeat them, but instead their faith, their hope, their love of their Savior Jesus led the way for the Good News of new life and hope to be shared for thousands of years. Their proclamation of hope in the face of fear changed the world for thousands of generations. May our proclamations and lives of hope in this season and beyond be an inspiration for the world to come.

There is always 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. There is hope in truly all times and places, by the power of God's love made tangibly in Jesus' death and resurrection.

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 cancelled or adapted this past 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.