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## **Easter! Beyond Clothes, Chocolate, Comfort, and Control**

**John 20:1-18**

**John 20:19-23**

So on that first Easter morning - before the women who found the empty tomb had made it back to report on their amazing news - the disciples of Jesus – those who had left home and family for Jesus, those who had walked the dusty roads for him, those who had risked being rejected by their families and local synagogues – those brave, courageous disciples are all huddled together behind locked doors, grieving his death, afraid to come out, and afraid to be seen for fear of what might happen to them.

Does that sound familiar?

And when, in John's gospel, Jesus first appeared to the disciples – behind those locked doors for fear that what had happened to Jesus would also happen to them – “Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” (Jn 20:19) Jesus showed the disciples his wounds, the proof of his suffering and death and then he says again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” (Jn 20:21)

On this Easter morning, we find ourselves huddled together behind closed doors, afraid to go out, afraid that what has afflicted and killed so many may do the same to us. Our necks are tight, our patience is short, and we need toilet paper and paper towels but are afraid to go out.

Did you notice, in the gospel reading, that it was dark when the women first show up at the tomb? And did you notice that it was also night when Jesus showed himself to the disciples in John 20:19? Night, it seems, is a good place to meet the resurrected Jesus.

On this Easter morning, in this new normal, when we are afraid and anxious and uncertain of what all of this means for the future, we not only know the disciples – we ARE the Disciples. We know how it feels to be afraid. We know how it feels to not be able to make sense of what is going on. We know how it feels to be out of control over our own lives. We know how it feels to be huddled behind locked doors and afraid of what will come next. We ARE the disciples.

And it is into OUR darkness, our fear, our uncertainty that Jesus comes today – to show us his wounds, to share with us in our suffering, to send us to a hurting and fearful world.

On any normal day – any normal Easter – following Jesus feels like one of many good things that we do. On any normal Easter, we would have had a sanctuary full and would have talked

with the children about what they got in their Easter baskets. On any normal Easter we would have dressed in our new clothes, instead of the same old sweats or house dress we have been wearing around behind locked doors. In any normal time, following Jesus is about adding activities into our already full lives and calendars. In normal times, we control our lives and schedules and we decide how much of it we want to give to God's causes or to worship. In normal times, deciding what we believe about who Jesus is and how God works in the world is what we do when we have free time.

But on today – on this Easter morning – it seems clear that it is our relationship with God which defines and shapes us and all we do. On this Easter – beyond clothes, chocolate, comfort and control - when Jesus shows up we realize that it is our belief and trust in Jesus as God incarnate that rearranges and controls our lives, our priorities and our hearts. When we see that God knows our suffering and enters into our suffering with us, our wounds don't hurt less but they make more sense. When Jesus says "Peace be with you" when all we can feel is fear and uncertainty, we still know that the mortgage must be paid and a new job must be found, but we also know that we are not defined by our ability to pay bills or what job we hold. When Jesus says, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" we reevaluate how important it is to put ourselves at risk to help another in need or to share what we have because someone else has nothing.

We know now – in this darkness – more than ever before that being a disciple of Jesus Christ either changes us completely from the inside out – or we have not yet met the resurrected Jesus. The God who is present in the person of Jesus Christ – the same Jesus who came through locked doors over 2,000 years ago in Jerusalem – still is able to come through our locked doors. That God offers us peace, grace, love, forgiveness and joy. That God – when we surrender and trust – changes us forever.

Perhaps you are wondering – why in the world would I want to surrender and trust in God? You know the difference between a pine tree and an oak tree? A pine tree has lots of tough roots that hold it upright. But although pine trees have lots of roots, the roots they have are very close to the surface. Oak trees also have lots of roots close to the surface of the soil, but in contrast with pine trees, Oak trees also have a tap root. A Tap root is a long center root that grows deep and straight into the ground. And, on the surface, one might not know the difference between having lots of roots very close to the surface and having a deep, long straight tap root into the soil. But, when storms come, it is the pine trees that fall over – because they do not have a tap root to hold them in the ground.

It is our willingness to love, trust and follow Jesus – into the middle of a hurting and fearful world – in a spirit of humility, love, sacrifice and faithfulness – that is our tap root. And when we find ourselves being tossed and bent and about to fall over in this storm – in this dark night – then remember that what Jesus offers to all of his disciples is "Peace." When the whole world thinks that everything is lost, when we feel we can't suffer any more, when the night around us is dark, that is a great place to meet the resurrected Jesus. It has always been so.

This week, I was sent a beautiful video poem written by a woman named, Christine Valters Paintner, called *Praise Song for the Pandemic*. Beautifully written and set to images and music, Ms. Paintner gives thanks and praise for all sorts of things. But at the end of the poem she says, “And when this has past, may we say that love spread more quickly than any virus ever could, may we say this was not just an ending but also a place to begin.”<sup>i</sup>

When, in a moment, we share the sacrament of communion together remotely, I pray that you will remember that even the disciples were grieving Jesus’ death when he appeared to them. It was in a very dark place, behind locked doors, where they met him first. So, through our own locked doors and dark places, today we take the risk to invite Jesus to take over our hearts, our lives, our calendars and our futures. No matter where we find ourselves, be assured that this is not just an ending, but also a place to begin again. It doesn’t mean that we will not suffer. Inviting Jesus in doesn’t mean that we will not die. Giving our lives over to God’s control does not mean that we will “live happily ever after.” But inviting Jesus to take over our lives is the tap root that allows us to stand in the midst of any storm. Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. So do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” (John 14:27)

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<sup>i</sup> *Praise Song For The Pandemic* video; Christine Valters Paintner from [abbeyofhearts.com](http://abbeyofhearts.com) and [www.theworkofthepeople.com](http://www.theworkofthepeople.com) Music by [www.giantsandpilgrims.com](http://www.giantsandpilgrims.com)