

Resurrection of Our Lord 2022 (RCL/C): "Our Message: Because of This We Can Face Anything"
1 Corinthians 15:19-26; Luke 24:1-12
April 17, 2022
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

The life of a wonderful, busy, creative, devoted congregation like ours is complex. There are a lot of moving parts, a lot of helping hands, a lot of activities and people to coordinate. Our members and visitors are pretty understanding if something falls between the cracks or doesn't go exactly as planned. Honestly, that happens on a fairly regular basis and we've learned to adjust our sails, chuckle and move on. This is Holy Trinity's 100th anniversary year and we're kicking off a yearlong celebration with a visit from our Bishop, Tracie Bartholomew, the weekend of September 24-25, and a special luncheon on the 25th. (Stay tuned!) One facet of entertainment will be outtakes/bloopers during worship, particularly during the pandemic. Believe me, we've got some great ones: a basket of stuffed birds tweeting during the reading of the Creation story during the Easter Vigil a few weeks into lockdown; an assisting minister with **very** quick reflexes catching a flying parament midair when it sailed off the temporary lectern we used for our original livestream; the day the wind toppled the camera stand during outdoor worship and the livefeed was of the sky; another day when a beagle ran right through our gathering, with his human close behind. We shouted after them they should come back when they could stay!

Not surprisingly, every once in a while, someone does register a complaint. The one I'll always remember came a couple days after 9/11 and was about the outdoor sign. One of our church friends called the office to say how very upsetting it was that the signboard was empty when we all needed encouragement. Point well-taken. There was indeed no message posted on either side, for the only time I can remember in 25 years. I'm the one who usually comes up with the message, and I was overwhelmed and speechless. But our friend Carol's nudge got me going

again. So did our friend Shellie's message on a posterboard nailed to the telephone pole ½ a block down at Main & Central. HAVE HOPE. PRAY FOR PEACE. BELIEVE IN AMAZING GRACE. We posted that message on our signboard, we printed it on magnets that we mailed out – and I still see some of those magnets on the fridges of Holy Trinity friends who were around then.

An empty signboard. An empty tomb. The scary sounds of silence. The echo of previously occupied, now vacant space. The assumption that something has been stolen, taken from us, gone to parts unknown, maybe gone forever, unless the message and faith are renewed or the jewelry shows up at a pawn shop or the body turns up. Or maybe like the sadness of an apartment or house that was home, after all the furniture has been moved and rugs rolled up, with the moving van sitting in the driveway or at the curb. The 'tween time between what was and what shall be.

The women who went to the tomb didn't arrive with "Happy Easter!" balloons and "Welcome back from the dead!" signs. They were equipped with spices to fold into our Lord's grave clothes and to counteract the odor of decay from His crucified and very dead body. Did they remember He'd predicted He'd die **and then rise** three days later? Did they remember the prediction and simply discount it? Or did the trauma of what they'd all been through and especially of what they'd seen **Jesus** go through erase the memory of the promise?

Trauma can do that: 9/11, Sandy, COVID, disease, death. Trauma can erase the tape of the promises our Lord has made to us.

- I am the light of the world.
- I am the bread of life.
- I am the good shepherd.
- I am the vine, you are the branches.
- I am the way, the truth and the life.
- I am the resurrection and the life.

Trauma can make us forget who and Whose we are. It can render us speechless. It can render us hopeless. But today God still is able, still wants to reach into the tomb of our brokenness, sending the Holy Spirit to resurrect our faith, our hope, our love.

Timothy Keller is a Presbyterian pastor who founded Redeemer, a thriving church in NYC, and also created a world-wide church-planting organization. He was diagnosed with stage 4 pancreatic cancer a couple years ago and last year wrote that after the doctor told him he would not survive the disease, “My wife... and I spent much time in tears and disbelief.”¹ Just this year he was interviewed about his view of Easter, in the light of his faith and of his disease.

Holy Week gives you both death and resurrection. They don’t make any sense apart. You can’t have the joy of resurrection unless you’ve gone through a death, and death without resurrection is just hopeless... [D]eath/resurrection... is absolutely at the heart of what it means to live a Christian life.

And actually everything in life is like that. With any kind of suffering, if I respond to it by looking to God in faith, **suffering drives me like a nail deeper into God’s love**, which is what cancer has done for me. ...I look at Easter and I say, “**Because of this, I can face anything.**”²

The tomb was empty of the Lord’s body because the Risen Lord was out in the world, as He still is, in Word and Sacrament, in the fellowship of faith, in the last, the lost and the least, through whom we serve Him. “Because of this, we can face anything.”

The message that the angels gave the women was, “*He is not here, but has risen.*” (Luke 24:5d) The ladies transmitted the message to the men, “*But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.*” (Luke 24:11) It’s only in meeting the Risen Lord when He appears to them, that the message gets through to the others! Our belief that the Risen Lord is with us, even and especially in the midst of challenges, in the wake of crises like 9/11 and Sandy and COVID, this will be a sign to others that “Christ is risen, alleluia! He is risen indeed, alleluia!” Because of this, we can face anything. **That** is our message, in all seasons. Amen

¹Tish Harrison Warren, “A Dying Pastor and Jesus’ Return” (NY Times, April 15, ’22), A18.

²Ibid.

