

April 8, 2020

Dear Easter People of the Susquehanna Conference,

Grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ the Risen Lord!

Christ is risen!
He is risen, indeed! Hallelujah!

I would like to take this opportunity to say, "Thank you, thank you and thank you!" from the bottom of my heart for your steadfastness and faithfulness during this unprecedented season of challenge, due to the pandemic of coronavirus. Under these extraordinary circumstances, our people, clergy and laity alike, continue to serve the essential ministries of the church with collaboration and creativity, as well as commitment, dedication, and diligence. I extend my sincere thanks to the Cabinet, conference leaders and staff as well. They constantly, conscientiously, and so freely offer themselves to the evolving needs of our conference. Thanks be to God for all of you! I am truly humbled to serve our beloved church with you.

This pandemic has created a different reality in every aspect of our lives. Now the world is different. This Easter is different. It's the first time that God's people of Jesus Christ are not gathered in person to celebrate the brightest moment in human history. Our hearts break with a hunger and thirst to share the joy and blessings of Easter with the world and with one another, face to face in our favorite gathering places. However, what is not different is the living presence of the Risen Christ among us.

As I reflect on this week and the experience of the disciples I think about how much their reality would have changed as the week unfolded. How frightened and despairing they must have been as the week we call "holy" was nearing its end. They concluded that this Jesus could not save himself, and now it was dawning on them that he could not save them either. All that they hoped for was gone. They were heart-broken, depressed, and terrified. The only security that they had was locked doors.

Then in the midst of their thick darkness of despair, fear, and pain, the women who came to the tomb heard the words that they never expected: "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen. go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead.'" (Matthew 28:5-6)

Since that moment, the world has never been the same. The resurrection of Jesus the Christ changed the destiny of humanity. Victory over death, the last enemy of life, is finally won!

Among the biblical witnesses of the Risen Christ, one particular story speaks to me this Easter; that is his appearance to the disciples who were hiding in a room with the doors locked. In the midst of the uncertainty of their future, they were paralyzed.

Then, behold, the Risen Christ came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

Knowing well where the disciples were emotionally, mentally, and spiritually, as well as physically, Jesus knew exactly what his first words should be when he came to them for the first time after his resurrection: "Peace be with you!" It was not an accident that he said these words. The same words are repeated again and again in the story. And then one more time when he appeared to the disciples one week later.

Knowing well where we are on this Easter morning spiritually, as well as physically, I believe that Jesus will meet us and offer the same words: "My beloved, peace be with you!"

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." (John 14:27)

In the midst of all the things that trouble us and make us afraid, we embrace the peace that the Risen Christ offers, the peace that the world cannot give and the world cannot take away from us.

One of the most intriguing parts of the repeated appearances of the Risen Christ was Jesus showing the disciples the wounds in his hands and side. He even invited doubting Thomas to put his finger in his wounds. He wanted to make sure that Thomas knew he was real as his wounds were real.

The Risen Christ was in the resurrected body. It is supposed to be the perfect body for eternity. But it was not perfect. It had defects. It has scars. Deep wounds. Why?

Jesus wanted his people to know for sure how much he loved them and that his love for them stays the same for eternity. "See these nail marks and the pierced side in my resurrected body and be assured of my love for you now and forever." "I know your hurts and pains. I know your darkest hour of fear and despair. I was there. No matter what you may go through, I carry these nail marks and pierced side to let you know that you are not alone. I take your journey in the valley with you. As long as the world hurts, as long as the last soul is in pain, I carry the scars in my body.

We can put our trust for healing and hope in the One who carries the scars in his body for us, even in the resurrected body.

The God who raised Jesus from the dead is a God of "the third day." Jesus told his disciples over again and again that he would suffer and die, but on the third day would be raised to life. Easter is about this God of the third day. It's a proclamation that our God of the third day is a God of reversal, restoration, recreation, and resurrection! The Risen Christ is the proof that this third day God is here with us.

The power that brought death, fear and despair is no longer the ultimate power. There is a greater power and authority. The God of the third day is in charge. Now, goodness over evil, forgiveness over vengeance, love over hatred, hope over despair, wholeness over brokenness, and life over death are not just wishful thinking, but a reality for Easter people. With our God of the third day, we can face tomorrow. So we open our hearts and receive the peace that the Risen Christ offers as we put our total trust and hope in the One who is the resurrection and life yet carries the scars in his body.

Thanks be to God that we are Easter people. Our life journey becomes “to know Christ and the power of his resurrection” (Phil. 3:10).

Life is indeed worth the living because he lives. Hallelujah!

Christ is risen!
He is risen, indeed! Hallelujah!

In the name of Jesus Christ the Risen Lord, Prince of Peace, Healer of our brokenness, and Hope of the world.

Amen.