

April 12, 2020
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24
Matthew 28:1-10

The Resurrection of Our Lord/Easter Day
Pastor Amanda L. Warner

Emmanuel, Norwood, MA
Zoom Worship

Is this the Day that the Lord Has Made?

My favorite movie when I was growing up was *The Sound of Music*. We never missed it when it was shown on TV once a year and then, when I was in sixth grade, we got a VCR and the first VHS movie I got was *The Sound of Music*.

I watched it almost every Saturday, probably for the rest of that year. I am not kidding or exaggerating when I say that I had every line and every note of the movie memorized. So perhaps that's what gave me delusions of Maria von Trapp grandeur, thinking that I could teach a song to my family in a matter of minutes. I pictured Maria, teaching the von Trapp children to sing the scales and then having them singing in harmony a matter of minutes later.

Yes, I still am able to separate fact from fiction, but still, I thought, how hard could it be. After all, I had an even better starting point than she had. Five out of six of us are part of an organized chorus or choir. This would be easy.

I asked my family to come to church at one so that we could learn and record a song for Easter Sunday worship.

"How long would it take," they asked.

"I don't know, 45 minutes," I confidently said.

Well, after an hour and fifteen minutes, and beginning to think that we would all need to find new lockdown buddies, I sent them away for a half hour break. When we gathered together again, we worked on it for another hour, before we got something that was even close to something that we were comfortable putting out there in worship.

So, it turns out, we're not the von Trapps. But during the time that we were practicing, the lines from our Psalm drilled themselves into my brain, over and over again, "This is the day that the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it."

At hour two I started to analyze those words, I started to hear them as questions, pronouncements or declarations.

“This is the day that the Lord has made? Is this the day that the Lord has made?”

“Will we rejoice, can we rejoice and be glad in it?”

Like most of you, I have been consuming more news than I normally do. Normally, I’m not home when Britton sits down to watch the news every night. But I have been home at that time more in the past few weeks, so I have watched the news with him. And I have been scrolling through my news app on my phone a little more than usual.

I’m trying to find that fine line between staying informed during this time of global crisis and allowing my news consumption make me anxious or angry.

And a couple of times, I have seen it. I haven’t clicked on the articles to read more, but I have seen that there are religious people out there making proclamations about why God has sent what they call this “new plague” to the world.

It was inevitable. It happens almost every time there’s some kind of natural disaster. It happens probably in every religion, but in this country, the media usually picks up and shares the words of Christians of a particular stripe, claiming that they know why whatever disaster has occurred happened or is happening. They say that it’s a sign of God’s wrath and God’s judgment, for something that particularly offends them.

So, they feel that they can and should say, “This is the day, this time of crisis, is the day that the Lord has made. And here’s why.”

The problem for me as a Lutheran Christian, is that that just isn’t how my faith and theology has taught me to understand the world.

I believe that if the cross of Christ teaches us nothing else, it teaches us

that God can be found reliably with the suffering, aiding them, strengthening them, supporting them, helping them to survive and even thrive, and working for their liberation, not causing their suffering.

There is no question that natural disasters happen. An argument could be made that, with the presence of a deadly virus shutting down our society and cutting us off from one another and even from our Easter Sunday worship, that we are living through a natural disaster, even though this is no storm. There is no howling wind, no rising water, no mountains of snow, no raging fire, no shaking earth. In most ways, this is nothing like the natural disasters that we have seen before.

Natural disasters remind us, not is not that God is a wrathful God, but that creation itself is broken. Creation itself is not functioning the way that God intended it to. In the storms that rage through our lives and our world, we do not see God deciding to afflict us. Instead we see in storms, in fires, in earthquakes, in turmoil that shakes our lives, and even in a virus, the brokenness of God's good, beautiful, beloved creation. We hear these words in Paul's letter to the church in Rome:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves (Romans 8:19-23a)

We are living through a natural disaster, with all of its frightening implications for life and death, for the economy, for the well-being of those who must go out, and for people's mental and emotional well-being. We are living

through a venture of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Given that, what does it mean for us to say that: “This is the day that the Lord has made.”

Perhaps it is a bit easier because we say those words on Easter day, a day when we learn exactly where God is aligned when it comes to questions of life and death, of healing and brokenness, of sin and evil.

On Easter day, we learn, again, that God is on the side of life, on the side of healing, on the side of forgiveness, on the side of reconciliation. On Easter day we find that the tomb is empty, and that the God we tried to reject, we tried to keep at a distance, the God we crucified, will not leave us alone.

Talk about words that we need to hear, in a time, when our Easter celebrations are socially distanced and cannot include gatherings at church or big community wide Easter Egg hunts, or special meals with friends and family, in a time when we are separated, not just today, but every day, from friends, from family, from co-workers, from fellow church members, from classmates, from each other.

In a time when we feel so very alone, the Easter promise is that God will not leave us alone, will not leave us isolated, will not let us sentence ourselves to death. God’s will is for our life. God’s will is to be Emmanuel, God with us. The empty tomb tells us that there is hope beyond the loneliness, the solitude, the silence of the grave; that there is hope for resurrection.

And so, today and every day lived in the light of the resurrection, that tells us that our God is a God of love, and of power, and of hope, we can say that “This is the day that the Lord has made!” And we can rejoice.

In some ways, we are closer on this day, to having an Easter experience that like that of Jesus’ first disciples.

Their world had been completely upended by death. They had seen their friend, their rabbi, their Messiah, the one that some of them had even come to understand as the Son of God, arrested. And they had run away.

But the women had followed him and no doubt had reported back to the rest of the disciples, how Jesus had been beaten, tortured, and crucified. How he had died and been buried in a borrowed tomb.

The disciples were huddled in a room, afraid to go out, knowing that only death awaited them outside of the walls of the place where they hiding. Sound familiar?

The women went out, to go to Jesus tomb and anoint him with oils and spices. It was the last thing that they could do for their teacher, one they had loved, one they had followed.

But when they got there, there was a natural disaster. The earth shook, and the stone was rolled away. Those Pilate had put in place to guard the tomb so that no one could steal Jesus' body and claim that he had been raised from the dead, fainted. And an angel of the Lord, appeared to the women and said to them, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." (Matthew 28:6-7)

So, the women followed the angel's instructions, running to tell the disciples this amazing, wonderful news. but they went with fear and great joy.

The reason for their joy is perhaps obvious. The Lord they loved was alive, they had seen an angel, and the tomb was empty!

But they were also afraid, because what they were experiencing was totally knew, something they never even thought to hope for, life from death, uncharted waters, ventures of which they could not see the ending, paths untrodden, perils unknown.

And I suspect that is what many of us are experiencing on this strange Easter Day. Fear because we are in uncharted waters. We are having a totally new

experience as a society. Some among us are in great danger and we do not know what is going to happen. Fear is a sign of the times that we are living in.

But great joy is also a sign of the day that we are living. And great joy can be a mark of all of the days ahead. Because today is Easter Day. The tomb is empty, Christ is risen! The risen Lord met the women running from the tomb with fear and he told them, “Do not be afraid.”

That same risen Lord comes to us in our great fear and he brings us comfort and hope and even community.

And, so we can say on this Easter day, “This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.” Thanks be to God! Amen.