

April 4, 2021  
The Resurrection of Our Lord—Easter Day  
John 20:1-18  
Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Norwood, MA  
Zoom Worship During the Coronavirus Pandemic  
Pastor Amanda L. Warner

### Ready or Not Christ is Risen

For me, this has been a very long week. It feels like Palm Sunday must have been about a month ago. Of course, rationally, I know that it wasn't, I know that it was just seven days ago, but a lot has happened in those seven days.

Seven days ago, my sister and her boys were visiting.

Six days ago, they had an offer accepted on a house here in Norwood, which was a huge joy and relief.

Five days ago, there was a home inspection, and they left and headed back to Connecticut to spend more time visiting my parents. Then there were doctors' appointments, and Karate, and the busyness of our regular lives.

Four days ago, was a full day of worship preparations, final bulletin reviews, music making, all different kinds of preparation for what is called the great three days, which was about to begin.

Three days ago, the great three days, the Triduum began with sermon writing, more final bulletin checks, sending bells and butterflies to our church's children, communion services, and Maundy Thursday worship.

Two days ago, it was Good Friday, which, for me, on many levels turned out to be a very bad Friday, with a disrupted Good Friday service, some family disharmony around musical preparations for the Easter Vigil, and a disappointing loss for my favorite basketball team, and really, the only sports team I follow with any kind of focus, in the final four.

One day ago, yesterday, it was Holy Saturday, a day filled with preparations for the Easter Vigil and for Easter Sunday, the sanctuary being dressed for Easter, for

the people who will come here later today to receive Holy Communion. Last year, the altar remained stripped for months after the recording that we made for the Maundy Thursday service, because of the lockdown, so this year, it felt especially meaningful to see just a few masked members of the Altar Guild here to dress the chancel in its Easter finery. There were emails to send, worship reminders to share, Zoom security settings to check and revise, another sermon to write, Easter dresses to buy, because we've had enough of Easter in our pajamas at our house, and the Vigil to lead and experience.

I wonder how many of you have had a busy week too. With the demands of your work or your family, with the challenges of a world lurching back to life in the midst of a pandemic that still has us in its grip, in spite of the growing numbers of vaccinated and the hope that we see on the not-too-distant horizon.

For as long as I can remember, Holy Week has been, well, a holy week for me. When I was a young child, my parents wouldn't take my sister and me to the Good Friday service at our church, because they were afraid that we would be scared by it. My church had this huge sheet of metal with handles on it that some of the ushers would shake when the announcement was made during the service that Jesus had died. My parents were right. Once they decided I was old enough to attend the Good Friday service, and heard that thunderous sound for the first time, it felt like it was tearing something deep in my soul. Telling me something about the rending of the world, about the brokenness and emptiness of a world that had rejected and killed God. The sound seemed to go on and on and on, it was relentless, sad, and scary. As well it should be.

But in those days before I was allowed to go to Good Friday worship with my parents, my grandparents, who were visiting for Easter, would babysit us, and I would sing *Were You There* for them. Because I knew that it was Good Friday, that it was Holy Week, a time set apart, a time for focus, a time for to live in the story the story of a meal shared, the story of betrayal, the story of arrest, the story

of a trial and torture, the story of crucifixion, the story of death and a burial in a borrowed tomb, the story of friends, scared and sad, then, the Easter joy of resurrection. For me, the world always felt like it stopped during Holy Week.

But not this year.

This year, life has marched on, with its highs and its lows, with its challenges and its demands, with worries about what is going on in the lives of people I care about, in ups and downs of our national life, the ups and downs of virus cases, in the ebb and flow of nations and global concerns.

This year there have been many questions asked to me by others and in my own heart about what happens next, when do we go back into our church building for worship beyond communion? What does that look like and how do we honor the community that has been built here in this Zoom worship space where we have found that God has met us and nurtured us and blessed us with Word and Fellowship?

So many things going on, so many things filling our minds, so many questions about the future. Do we have time for this story, can Easter break through the noise, the worries, the busyness for some, the boredom and isolation for others?

We meet today, as we do on every Easter Sunday, Mary Magdalene on the hurrying through the darkness to the tomb where she had seen Jesus buried, on the first day of the week. Other gospels writers give her a motive for the journey, that she and the other women were going to anoint Jesus' body for burial, John does not. In his gospel, Mary goes to the tomb alone, and there is no stated practical reason for her journey. Maybe she just goes to mourn.

But when she got there, she got a surprise. The stone had been rolled away from the mouth of the tomb. So, she ran back to tell the disciples what had happened and Peter and another disciple, ran to the tomb to see for themselves what had happened. They saw the stone rolled away. They looked into the tomb, and Peter went in. He saw the cloths that Jesus had been wrapped in after he had

died but Jesus was gone. They still did not know or understand what had happened. And they went back to where they had come from. They were not ready for Easter. They weren't mentally or emotionally prepared to grasp resurrection. A stone mysteriously rolled away, a missing body must have seemed like more problems, more worries, more loss in an already overwhelming week. That probably didn't feel at all holy to them.

Mary must have made the journey with them, run back to the tomb with them, because the text says, "But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb."

Then, she looked into the tomb and she saw angels sitting there, where Jesus' body had been. The angels asked her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" And she told them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."

And here's the amazing thing, for Mary, who didn't have the mental or emotional or theological framework to understand resurrection when confronted with an empty tomb. Here's the wondrous thing for the disciples, who didn't even have it in them to stay at the tomb and weep for all that was lost. Here's the miraculous thing even for us who come to this Easter Sunday battered not by the immediate terror and shock of being locked down by a pandemic, but by the wearying tedium and worry of a year of trouble, of the stresses of lock down and reopening, of viral surges, of staggering numbers dead, of violence, of political fighting, of a world turned upside down, who might not even have had it in us to walk the road of Holy Week, being too emotionally raw to sit with such a troubling story or just being too busy in lives that are marching on with no time to pause for the silence, for the grief, for the tears, and for stories of Holy Week. Jesus doesn't wait until we're ready.

Jesus didn't wait until Mary figured out what had happened. He didn't wait for her to recognize him.

She saw him, but didn't know him. He spoke to her, but she didn't recognize him. She thought that he was the gardener. She pleaded with him to have Jesus' body returned, given to her so that she would care for it, find a new, safer place, for her Lord to be buried.

But he did not turn away from her, because didn't know, because she didn't understand, because she didn't see. He gave her what she needed to open her eyes. He called her by name. "Mary!"

And then she knew. And then she saw. And then she cried in joy, "Rabbouni!" She knew that her teacher, her Lord, had become her risen savior.

Mary wasn't ready for Easter, and the resurrected Jesus came to her and spoke her name and brought her out of her grief, brought her back to life anyway.

And that same resurrected Jesus is the one who meets us this Easter Sunday morning. No matter what kind of Holy Week we've had. No matter what we don't understand. No matter how many doubts have assailed us this long hard year. No matter if we are so filled with bad news that we can hardly grasp the good news that Jesus brings. No matter how unprepared we are to see resurrection, even when its standing right in front of us. Jesus comes to us and calls us by name and loves us back to life.

And for the ones who have sowed in tears, Jesus gives shouts of joy. And to the ones who mourn, Jesus gives beauty for ashes and the oil of gladness.

Because in Jesus' resurrection, God has promised that the brokenness of creation can be healed, that the chasm of sin has been bridged, that where death seems to be victorious, God brings eternal life.

And that promise is for us whether we're ready or not. Because it is Easter Day. The tomb is empty. And Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!