

Easter Account Matthew 28...

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. ² Suddenly, there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, and going to the tomb, he rolled away the stone and was sitting on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. ⁴ The guards were so terrified of him that they shook and became like dead men. ⁵ The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid! I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here. He has risen, just as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. ⁷ Go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has risen from the dead! And look, he is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see him.' See, I have told you!" ⁸ They hurried away from the tomb, with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly^[a] Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!"

They approached, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him.

¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go, tell my brothers that they should go to Galilee, and there they will see me."

Welcome from Pastor, then Easter Greeting:

Covid-19 is big. There's no denying it is present on the minds – and in the lives – of people throughout our world. You and I are not left unaffected. But the shadow of Covid-19 does not darken out Easter. Take a look at this reminder:

- [slide] "Easter cannot be canceled. 2000 years ago all the forces of hell tried that. They failed."

And so though you heard me start off my welcome here saying "Covid-19 is big," the last word on this Easter Sunday for us as believers in Jesus - and the enduring Word – is this: "Christ is Risen!"

"He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!"

We are spending Easter 2020 physically distanced from one another. And that undoubtedly brings a certain measure of disappointment. I would love to have each of you here, to be able to greet you in person with the Easter greeting which we love. [pause] We can acknowledge what this virus can do. But let's also use this opportunity to highlight what this virus cannot do. It does not change the fact of this day and what it means for us: Jesus - Risen, Living, Ruling.

And so it does not touch in any way the true reason that we celebrate.

The prevention measures mean we are physically distanced this Easter. But Covid-19 cannot separate us – not really. Not from Christ. And not from one another as ones united to Christ through faith in His life, death and resurrection for us. So with a united voice – wherever you are – give the reply that proclaims this comfort and certainty. I say to you this Easter morning: "Christ is Risen!"

"He is risen indeed! Alleluia!"

Easter 2020 An Answer to the Outbreak

Is there an answer for the outbreak? People are asking that this Easter.

You've likely heard how Covid-19 is labeled "novel," meaning the human body has never experienced this virus before. And so this is the reason it has more severe effects and kills at a much higher rate than other viral attackers, which our bodies are used to fighting.

Because of this, the outbreak of Covid-19 is a daunting moment in our national, our communal, and our personal history. I heard where Dr. Jerome Adams, Surgeon General, said – speaking, I believe, especially about this past week and the coming days: "This is going to be our Pearl Harbor moment, our 9/11 moment, only it's not going to be localized, it's going to be happening all over the country." Those other examples he brings up make clear the magnitude of the enemy we are facing now. At the same time, the examples he cites expand our perspective. Don't they? The outbreak of covid-19 is a chapter in a much larger history. Not only national history. Human history.

Why stop at Covid19? Name the rest. Causes of death are a formidable group. Heart disease. Cancer. Accident. Respiratory disease. Stroke. Influenza. Diabetes. Kidney disease. That's just most of the top 10. I And it shows...

The issue of sickness, fear and death is bigger than Covid19. This outbreak is simply the newest and most prominent page in the larger history: "the outbreak of death." And so now, now, we've arrived at the problem about which we should really be asking our question:

Is there an answer for the outbreak?

Death was the topic on everyone's mind going into the first Easter morning. At least it was on the hearts of every believer in Jesus who knew what happened in Jerusalem on that Friday when Jesus died. And so there is a striking bond we share with Jesus' followers from the first Easter Sunday – death is prominent in our lives, on our minds.

There's more to draw us close to the first Easter and unite us with Jesus' followers that day.

Here I am. The church is almost empty. In 21st century America, Easter has become the Sunday when the church is more full than any other time, even more than Christmas. Now there is only a meager band gathered here. That's no fault of you watching on Livestream. It's just *not what I expected*.

A meager band. Just a handful of souls. That's how the *first* Easter morning began. Women, from among Jesus' followers, made plans for visiting His tomb on that morning. They expected that place to be full. But when they arrived it was suddenly empty. Jesus' tomb empty.

Have you seen the picture circulating that makes this connection between our Easter, 2020, and the first Easter?

[Show Image] This room empty on Easter? [church]

Relax. This one still is as well. [Jesus' tomb]

And that gives just the comfort we need right now. Prevention measures for Covid19 are one symptom of the disease. But the even more devastating symptom is the death toll.

There will be an attempt to measure the painful economic impact of this all when it is done. But we really can't measure – there is no dollar figure that can be put to – the loss of life. Especially for all who have personally lost loved ones in this pandemic. Death defies being "measured" – its effects are of such a quality that you or I can't quantify it. Not really, right?

And yet... Death does have a limit. There's a point – a place and a time – it cannot reach, where it will no longer be something to deal with.

How do I know? How can you be sure? You have Jesus' Word. That's God's Word. You have Jesus standing alive after death to guarantee & prove it.

And how will we experience it, how can we be assured we'll be in on it – the time and place the outbreak of death is over, done, defeated... and life, only life, goes on and on and on and on? Trust in Jesus' life and death for you, as God's gift to save you.

That's the only way to the victory of life. Someone might ask, "Why? Why is it this way? And why is there death in the first place?"

Take a step back from Easter. You have to go back further in time, further back than Easter, to answer:

Why do we die?

And why did *Jesus* – God the Son – have to take on human flesh and have to *live and die*, in order to bring us victory over death's outbreak?

Well, go back with me to when death began. Yes. Just like you and I can remember a time before Covid19, there was a time before death. The world was without it; and it was without sickness of any kind then. There were no problems. But humanity changed that. Adam and Eve sinned. And that first sin of Adam and Eve spread sin to all humanity. And with it, death.

I know sin itself is not something that can be scientifically observed and analyzed. You can't put a slide under a microscope and detect its presence. But it is present, in every one of us. Lying silent, unseen within us all.

Maybe it seems asymptomatic for the first days of life, as there aren't as many ways – or at least as flagrant of ways – that we humans exhibit the evidence of the sin we all carry. But then what may have hidden more silent for a time appears in magnified symptoms. Like fevered anger that lashes out in words that sting and leave hearts wounded. Like insidious selfishness that wants one's way even when that way requires others be hurt: used, abused or neglected in the process. Sin coughing, sputtering its way out – in greed, in pride – symptoms of an underlying problem. A heart problem. An attitude: "It's my life; I'll do what I want."

Ahh, it finally comes down the root issue. Sin puts us at odds with God. Sin is rebellion against God. And such rebellion deserves banishment. That's what hell is. Separation from God. That's what we rightly deserve. There is no denying this justice.

But is there a way for God's justice to be met, *and* for us sinners to be freed from having to face hell / eternal death?

This is where we get back to the reason why *Jesus* – God the Son – came. And why He went to His death. It wasn't for anything wrong He had done. He went in our place. He took the punishment our sins deserved. He suffered hell on the cross. All so God's justice is met.

And *Jesus* says, "Here is my gift to you. Place your hope in what I've done - what you couldn't do for yourself. This is your way to peace with God. I am your way. My life and death for you is the answer to you having eternal life with me in heaven. Trust me, and you don't have to be afraid to die and face your holy God."

"Is there an answer for the outbreak?" That's the question for which we are looking to God for an answer today. Is there a way to end up alive on the other side of this outbreak - death? Today is the day that we see God's answer is, "Yes!" *Jesus* is alive after death, never to die again. And His promise is: "He who believes in me will live, even though He dies" – John 11:25-26.

This is the only answer to *victory* that will never fade – that lasts forever.

Prof Rich Gurgel cited the Time magazine interview of Dr. Bruce Aylward of the World Health Organization. Asked about Covid19 "How do you think this will end?", Dr. Aylward answered, "This will end with humanity victorious over yet another virus." This man seeks to calm the world's fears with his answer.

We all want a victory over this virus. We too will rejoice if a vaccine is developed successfully, and as more effective life-saving methods are discovered for dealing with COVID-19. But we ought to also recognize: if we win a battle against the "Covid-19 outbreak," the outbreak of death still will rage on. We are still subject to it. And humanity does not have the power, even with all our collective ability working together, to rise to the occasion of defeating this enemy. A whole host of other viruses, diseases, causes of death linger: our lives in this world are frail and fleeting.

Humanity is not the answer to what deep down is wrong with us, and makes us afraid. Because humanity cannot overcome sin and death.

The women had come out to the grave of Jesus on that first Easter with a mixture of fear, powerlessness, and hopelessness. But suddenly they found the reality: their dear Lord was no longer dead. Death held no power over him. And because of his saving work, they no longer had any reason to live in hopelessness and fear.

Want to find what alone can answer fear and death? It is found in a graveyard, housing an empty tomb. "Do not be afraid," says the angel. "Do not be afraid," says the risen Lord. "Do not be afraid," I can say to you and you can say to me. This is God's message to all who believe in Jesus. This is the unique, life-giving, death-conquering message of Easter.

Easter proclaims that there is now nothing in this world, or the next, that can rightfully make us, who are Jesus' own, afraid. Our lives have never truly been in our own hands. Our lives rest in the nail-marked hands of the crucified and risen One. And even though fears still will arise in our lives, yet here is where we go to silence them: our hope is not in ourselves - our hope is not in mankind. Our hope is in God! The God who wondrously created us, and who in wondrous love rescued us out of sin and death and restored us to himself in the life, death, and resurrection of his Son. In our fallen world where pandemics still break out, Jesus patiently reassures us: "Do not be afraid. I am your answer for death. For I am the resurrection and the life." Amen.

Word from Pastor, with the closing blessing

Certainly we want to be together in person again. And we will. I can't tell you how soon. But in the meantime – through it all – we will never forget that our source of our peace and joy hasn't changed. The church may be almost empty. But the One who left His tomb empty is certainly here still. And He is right with you in your home or wherever you are as you watch this. He is... Present. Living. His grave is still empty. And in Him, your sins are forgiven. Through faith in Him heaven is your home. He is leading you with His truth as you turn here and read here and listen [the Bible]. And He is giving you peace.

Receive the blessing of our eternal, living, all-powerful Lord...