

The Lutheran Church of the Atonement
Florissant, Missouri
Easter Sunday -- Year C
April 17, 2022
Isaiah 65:17-25; St. Luke 24:1-12
First Corinthians 15:19-26

Just think: it was two years ago that the best we could do for an Easter Sunday service was to have Pastor Dan and me record a service on Pastor Dan's smartphone. We had some pre-recorded music and hymns. We had photos of about 150 members and families taped to the pews. Pastor Skarstad read the Lessons. Pastor Dan offered a children's message from out in the garden. All told, better than 300 households celebrated Easter by worshipping with us on-line. But it felt far from normal.

Last year, we were back in the building but all wearing masks and social distancing, ...not shaking hands, much less hugging, and everyone being very cautious. About half of those who worshipped with us did so on-line. Better, ...but still far from normal. This year, we are inching ever closer to normal, with masks required at only one service. The processional cross led us into worship. The Communion chalice is back, if only for Intinction. The choir sang its customary three anthems -- without having to wear masks to sing. Yes, it's starting to feel more and more like normal, ...more like a normal Easter.

On that very first Easter morning, the Gospel writers all tell us, some women -- the exact number is uncertain -- went to the tomb of Jesus to anoint His body as part of the prescribed burial rites. There they found the stone rolled away, the tomb empty, and a messenger (or messengers) in bright robes -- the exact number is uncertain -- telling them that Jesus was risen from the dead, just as He had said! Then, as instructed, the women went back to find the disciples, still hiding in fear in that upper room. In their excitement, they pounded on the locked door, and, when they were finally admitted, they all-but-

shouted, "Good news!" Jesus is risen! Now, everything can get back to normal!" Maybe, not,.....

But, isn't that how it sometimes feels, even for the most devout Christians? We've patiently endured the disciplines of Lent. Perhaps, we've given up some kind of favorite treat or privilege. We've been reminded -- more often than we like -- of our sinfulness and our fallen state. Perhaps, we've attended Wednesday evening worship or read daily devotions. But, now, good news; Easter has finally arrived, and even church life can get back to normal. For some reason, I don't think that was Jesus's idea.

Perhaps, you have been intrigued, as I have been over the years, by the opening line of today's Second Lesson, where Paul writes, "If for this life only we have hoped in Christ,..." after which Paul goes on to argue that Jesus's Resurrection is the assurance of our own resurrection. Which is kind of what we expect to hear on Easter Sunday. Yes, Jesus is risen as "the first fruits of those who have died." Yes, this is the resurrection-unto-eternal-life for all "those who belong to Christ." All good Easter stuff, to be sure. But, here's what I have found intriguing: that at least some in that Corinthian church were finding great hope "for this life" in the Christ, in God's Messiah. Somehow, they seem to have believed that Jesus's ministry, His life, death, and Resurrection, had profound implications "for this life" -- and offered a solid ground for "hope" in this life. So much so that Paul had to persuade them that Jesus's Resurrection also offered hope for the life to come.

For those new Christians in Corinth, the Resurrection of Jesus, the Promise of Easter, had nothing to do with returning to life as "normal." In fact, "normal" with its class struggles, its ethnic hostilities, its greed and lust and power-plays and warfare and needless pain and death is what they

hoped to be delivered from. No, the Promise of Easter had everything to do with God launching His "kingdom...on earth as in Heaven." It had everything to do with God inaugurating a new way -- a far more hope-filled way -- of being truly human in this world and "for this life." It had everything to do with becoming God's collaborators in launching God's "new creation," where God's love and mercy reign, and where God's justice and peace are the new "norm," the new "normal." Easter was (and is) good news "for this life"!

Because they were so confident in Paul's proclamation of the Resurrection, they shared Paul's vision of a church and a world where "there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for all are one in Christ." Thanks to the Resurrection, they shared Paul's vision of a church and a world "where no-one has too little and no-one has too much." Thanks to the Resurrection, they shared Paul's vision of a church and a world where husbands and wives loved and respected each other and where children and parents honored and cared for each other. Thanks to the Resurrection, Paul's vision of a church and a world where the hungry were provided for, where the sick were cared for, where the grieving were comforted, where the unjustly imprisoned were set free, and where God's people lived in peace with each other.

In other words, because they shared Paul's certainty in the Resurrection of Jesus, they were no less confident that, in Jesus, God had ultimately broken the power of sin and death, and had opened the door to a whole new way of living, a new way of life, a more abundant life, a truly hope-filled life.

Sometimes, I fear, our celebration of Easter and the Resurrection focuses so exclusively on the promise of a future life that we lose sight of the hope that the Resurrection offers no less for this life. Paul, I believe, would be the first to insist: it's not either/or, it's both/and.

Make no mistake. On that very first Easter morning, the women were not sent back to that upper room to announce that "Jesus has risen, so we can all go back to normal." In fact, that's the last thing Jesus would have wanted. Amen