

**Pastor Jonna Bohigian**  
**Our Living Hope**  
Matthew 28:1 – 10

Happy Easter! I know it's not the same, but maybe it'll be good for you to say it out loud too. Happy Easter! Whether you are normally a part of the St. Tim's community, or you are our guest today, we are so glad that you have joined us to worship and to celebrate!

This Easter is quite different from any we have ever experienced. You may be sitting in front of your computer or television screen in your Sunday best or in your pajamas, thinking, "This is so weird to celebrate Easter like this!" I hear you. I would *so* much rather worship with you in the flesh, see the little ones all dressed up, and to have watched their excitement as they hunted for eggs on the lawn.

Hunting for Easter eggs was always my family's favorite. Though I had three younger siblings, I frankly don't remember them hunting for eggs. Easter egg hunts in the Saethre household were not child's play; they were serious business. In my mind, these hunts were a test of perception, speed, hand-eye coordination, and endurance. And there were two competitors – my older sister and me. Every year, we competed to see who was the best. And every year, my wily older sister won. If my sister were here now, I would challenge her to a hunt-off!

I hope you have created some way to celebrate Easter this year. But I'm going to say it out loud, "It's just not the same." You went to the store and you couldn't find the special ham you would have baked. You weren't able to invite your family over for a large family gathering. You can't go anywhere except on the rare occasion, yet you are exhausted. You can't sleep well. Your kids are running around the house,

even now. You are overworked and concerned about your future. You are recently unemployed and filed for unemployment for the first time in your life. You have been sick or your loved ones have been sick. People that you know have died, or you fear that all too easily, someone that you love might die. You can't visit your parents or your grandparents in their care facility. Your financial future is in question, and your investments have taken a dump. You can't get together with friends or if you do, you need to be 6 feet apart or meet online. Sports have been canceled. Your school year is finished and you won't be able to walk for graduation. You feel alone and discouraged – or depressed. *You* have, *we* have, experienced loss, and we are grieving. Easter is not the same. *Life* is not the same.

And I can't help but believe that our experience of loss uniquely places us in a position to experience this Easter season in a *profound* way. A couple of weeks ago, my husband said, "You know? The first Easter came under less-than-ideal circumstances too." No kidding!

The first Easter came after the horrific death of an innocent man. The first Easter came after all hope was lost. The first Easter came after everyone had run away, except for a few women.

The disciples couldn't stay, for fear of being associated with this man. They knew all too well that if they hung around long enough, they too might suffer Jesus' fate. So they fled. They *didn't* stay. They hid, and they sat in shock, as they realized that the man they had surrendered their livelihoods for, was now dead. They had given up *everything* to follow him. They *loved* him. They were his closest companions, and now he was dead.

But the women stayed behind. No amount of fear, grief, or shock could pull them away. They would watch until the very end. They would watch, as he was laid in a tomb. They would watch as a stone was rolled to bar the entrance. They would watch, until they could not, for it was the Sabbath day. But they *would* return, just as soon as they could.

And so they do, near the break of dawn, the next morning. As they approach the tomb, the ground begins to shake, the guards faint, the stone is rolled away, and an angel appears out of nowhere and sits on the stone!

“Do *not* be afraid,” he says, “for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay” (Matt 28:5b – 6). He tells the women that Jesus has fulfilled his word; he has risen! He is *alive*! The angel invites them to see the evidence that Jesus is no longer dead. His tomb is empty. He tells them to go quickly and tell his disciples that he is alive and going ahead of them to Galilee. They will see him there.

The women cannot *help* but be fearful. *No one* has experienced what these women have experienced – *ever*! The angel, the earthquake, the guards, the empty tomb... Jesus is *alive*! They cannot help but fear this incredible sight, this incredible news. But their fear does not overcome them. They have just been given the greatest news, the greatest joy! The tomb is *empty*! Jesus is *alive*! Their joy *compels* them to run and tell the disciples. *No thing* and *no one* can hold them back! And on their way, Jesus shows up! A living, breathing, fleshy Jesus. Their best friend and companion has come back! They take hold of his feet and worship him.

This entire story simply seems unbelievable! What a story! An earthquake, an angel, guards fainting, an empty tomb, and Jesus resurrected from the dead! It seems simply too good to be true. And it's tempting to leave it at that – an unbelievable story from 2,000 years ago that doesn't mean anything for you and me today.

When the rubber meets the road, what does Jesus' resurrection mean for you today? How does Jesus' resurrection give you hope in the face of this devastating coronavirus pandemic?

In 1998, Hurricane Mitch was anticipated to sweep its way through Honduras. Friends of mine were living there as missionaries. They had built deep relationships with the people, and naturally felt the urgency to pray for everyone's protection. My friend desperately prayed that God would turn the storm back, that the land and people would be spared. To her horror, the hurricane came with a vengeance and obliterated 5,000 men, women, and children. Her image of God was washed away that day with the storm surge. What kind of a God would *not* listen to the pleas of thousands of praying people, to prevent innocent people from suffering? Shouldn't God *want* to prevent suffering? My friend grieved the image of God she had loved.

It is stories like these and circumstances like ours that cause us to consider God. Where is God, and why did He not prevent this suffering? These questions can be incapacitating. These questions can bring us to places of anger and resentment. These questions can bring us to Jesus.

My friend's image of God was washed away with the waves, and in its place grew a profound understanding that God does not avoid suffering. He does not avoid suffering, but *joins* our suffering to bring *life*. She commented, "You know, Jonna? God did not send Jesus to save us like Superman or Superwoman would. He did not send Jesus with the force and might of a superhero. He sent Jesus in *weakness*. He suffered and he died too."

This is the wonder of God. In His great love for us, God did not send a Superman or a Superwoman; He sent His one and only Son to suffer and die, so that through his death and resurrection, you and I might have *life*. Because of Jesus, the devil was stripped of his power; he is not winning and he *won't* win. Because of Jesus, your sin has been placed in his wounds, and you are forgiven; you are set free from sin and made right with God. Because of Jesus, you too will rise again, never to die. Because of Jesus, you are not alone; his presence is always with you. Because of Jesus, even the bleakest situations are used for good.

Don Giuseppe Berardelli was a priest in northern Italy, in "one of the areas hardest hit by the coronavirus pandemic." He had suffered from a respiratory condition and later contracted coronavirus. His parish wanted to ensure that he had a chance for survival, so they purchased a ventilator for him. But Berardelli refused the ventilator in order to save the life of someone younger than him. On March 15<sup>th</sup>, Berardelli passed away. There was no possibility for a funeral, but local reports said that in a town in southern Italy, citizens applauded him from their balconies at noon on Monday, March 16<sup>th</sup>." An American priest called him a "Martyr of Charity" and

quoted John 15:13: “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”<sup>1</sup>

This is what Jesus has done for *you*. He has laid down his life for *you*, his *friend*.

Even in the bleakest situations, when all hope appears to be lost, God is working for good. He is *not* done yet, and He is *not* done with you. He wants to give you hope, a *living* hope, the hope of Jesus. This is not a hope based in the stock market, our world leaders, your health, your good fortune, your education, your work, or your dreams. This hope *is Jesus*, the *Person of Jesus*, the only Son of God, who came to earth in vulnerable human flesh, to go to the cross for *you*. Fear could not prevent him, hatred could not dissuade him, the devil could not beat him, and the grave could not hold him. He has conquered death so that you might have *life*.

As a preacher once said, Friday happened, *but* Easter was just around the corner.

There is no greater news! Jesus rose from the dead, just as he said he would! Jesus is *alive*, and he is our hope! Jesus is our living hope!

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/italian-priest-coronavirus-ventilator-don-giuseppe-berardelli/>