

Scripture reading: Colossians 2: 1-5; 3: 1-4

Reflection: Rev. Lindsey Bell-Kerr

For me, Easter morning is one of the few days of the year that I am excited to get up early. I'm usually awake before my alarm, and am already singing Easter hymns before I leave the house. I leave the house, not even having had a single sip of coffee, and I drive through the dark, on the almost empty streets. Eager to get to the church. Eager to see the first person in the parking lot, or on the patio, so that I can greet them:

Christ is risen!

And hear the ancient response: He is risen, indeed! And then, Hallelujah, Hallelujah!

In all of the places I've lived, and the churches of which I have been a part, these words have remained the same.

These words are akin to what the apostle Paul writes this morning: *If you have been raised with Christ seek that things that are above... for when Christ who is your life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed in glory.*

Paul writes these words to the church in Colossus, sending encouragement from a far distance to another small outpost. He writes with affinity for those who has not seen in some time, and those he has never met. When we speak of the early church – this is all there is. There was no centrally located office. No buildings at all. No committees. No big worship services. No choirs. No summer camps or higher learning institutions. Just fledgling communities knit together from multiple households of believers, which existed at great distance from other, equally small communities.

Some didn't know each other, they may not even have known of each other. But they knew exactly what the church, and who the church was. Their hope, their joy, their good news, their mission statement, their life's purpose all rested in these simple words they spoke among themselves and to anyone who would listen

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed.

This is the first Easter in my life that I won't be at a church building. That's probably true for many of you. I confess, it feels strange. Even unnerving. We've come to count on traditions – on flower crosses and Easter eggs, hot-crossed buns and four-part harmonies. On particular songs and pleasant small talk.

These things matter. They are signs and symbols, and ways that we connect to the wider community and to one another. And on this Easter, we may be feeling their absence. We may be longing for Easter as usual.

But in the midst of this longing, God is offering us Good News: Easter was never about life as usual, but

about life as *unusual*. Life that persists in the face of uncertainty. Life that springs forth, casting out fear. Life that defies even death. Easter is about the new life that Christ offers us just past the edge of what we thought was possible.

In some ways, this may not feel like Easter, but in other ways this may be the Easterest Easter that ever Eastered, because I can't think of a time in the church's *life that we were closer to those early Christians*. Because, with so much of our institutional life and our relatively recent traditions set aside, we can hear more clearly these words that have been spoken through the generations. Words that we once declared in sanctuaries, but were first whispered in hushed tones, in the shadows of streets and in the kitchens of humble dwellings:

*Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!*

Beloved, these words have never meant more than they do for us on this Easter morning. These words of hope nurture us in our own lives. These words of life offer us hope in our community. These words speak the simple and profound mystery of our faith: God is not done with any of us. And love is stronger, even than death. What does this faith in the risen Christ mean for you right now? Today? Maybe you are seeing all the signs of new life. Maybe you are reaching out to care for others. Maybe you are witnessing how, in the face of this crisis, God's love is present in the kindness of strangers or in the fidelity of friends. Maybe these words come easily to you today: *Christ is risen. Christ is risen, indeed.*

Or maybe not. Maybe today is a difficult day, and maybe at this moment, your faith is faltering. If so, know that you are in good company. Since the very beginning, Christians held fast to each other, so that when one among them was losing heart, that person could be surrounded in love. Like us, they bound themselves in community, so that none lost their way. And they spoke this greeting in the darkness, not simply to proclaim, but to comfort, to reassure, to uplift each other by saying: Christ is risen, Christ is risen, indeed!

Beloved, on this Easter, more than any Easter I've known, we have an opportunity to remember who we are as the church and why we are the church, and how we are the church. And whenever it is that we gather together again, I hope we won't rush back to business as usual, but rather hold even stronger to our faith, and our faith alone which is essential.

Our faith, which on this Easter and every day is that Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Hallelujah! Amen!