**Revelation 1:9-18** April 12, 2020

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Easter

*Revelation 1:9I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet…*

*12I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, 13and among the lampstands was someone “like a son of man,” dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. 14His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. 15His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. 16In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.*

*17When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. 18I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.”*

Dear Friends in Christ,

Christ lives! He paid for our sin on Good Friday. On Sunday morning he made it official by rising from the dead. What the choir sang moments ago bears repeating, *“Triumphant from the grave rose Jesus strong to save. He crushed—O, Christian, mark it well—sin, Satan, death and hell!”* (CW 151:1) Christ is the victor over all our great enemies, especially the ones that look most frightening, who would hound us beyond this life! That is why we celebrate Easter, every year. We celebrate

**The Victor**

Not every day, however, feels like a victory parade.

This year, even Easter Sunday, has lost some of its shine. This is an Easter unlike any other in living memory. We cannot celebrate and worship together as we would like. How many of you watching have told me that you wish you could be here this morning with our small group of musicians and technicians in God’s house. I could see you thinking, “Maybe I can just sneak in the back pew?” I wish I could give each of you a special pass signed by the governor himself—just for this one Sunday, this one hour! How sad it is to tell people, “No, I really don’t think you should come to church on Easter Sunday.”

The man who wrote down our Bible reading this morning, knows right where you are sitting. The author of this closing book of the New Testament is the Apostle John. Writing by the Spirit’s leading, John wrote about one certain Sunday morning in his life. On other Sundays he was in church. But this Sunday he couldn’t get to church. It was no self-confinement for the good of others. He was imprisoned, or perhaps, since he was in his late 80s or 90s by this time, simply under house arrest. He was incarcerated ***“because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.”***

This was not strange to John. He had been one of Jesus’ inner circle of three, and so had his brother James. But his brother had been the first of Jesus’ Twelve (other than Judas Iscariot) to die. Actually, James had been executed. James and John, brothers, partners in business, disciples of Jesus, and then John left to make sense of his brother’s violent death. Over the next years, one by one, every single one of Jesus’ disciples met an untimely and gruesome end. Now, 60 years later, John was the last one left. Would you count that a blessing?

Several years ago, there was a radio interview of one of the Apollo astronauts, one of those twelve human beings who have set foot on the moon. He said that in a sad way, for him, life feels like a countdown. You know, “3—2—1.” Only it isn’t a countdown to a blast-off, it another countdown. He looks at the moon and thinks, “There are only five of us left.” And then the next Apollo funeral. “Now we are only four.” He said it like he didn’t want to be the last one.

I don’t know how John felt about being the last disciple of Jesus to walk the earth, the last direct link to the Savior, but there had to be at least a little loneliness to it. Now, he is in old age, imprisoned. Oh, I don’t imagine John was all that afraid of what the Roman government was going to do to him. But you don’t have to be frightened or in pain to grow weary of this world.

What bothers you about where you are right now?

For some, it might be the current epidemic. Some are very concerned, worried and anxious. We were not made to die. Often, people are more concerned for the people around them than for themselves.

Others are not happy about the economic impacts of what is going on. How many have filed for unemployment in the last three weeks? 16.8 million? And the government is pumping out trillions even as revenue falls off a cliff! Where is that going?

And if you are a high school senior, what of the missed athletic and academic opportunities? What of class trips to other states, other nations? If this is your last year of college, maybe your youthful optimism has persuaded you that everything will be just fine after graduation—or maybe you are getting less persuaded by the day.

Perhaps the biggest issues of your life have nothing to do with this crisis. Strained relationships, vicious politics, declining health…

Wherever you might be, as Jesus appeared to John to graciously lift his eyes to a better place, so this was written to lift your eyes. As you hear John’s vision of Jesus, *don’t* imagine that you are sitting in church. Imagine that you are sitting right where you are sitting this morning: in a place not of your choosing. This vision came to John because he *wasn’t* sitting in church, because he *couldn’t* sit in church. He wanted to be there. He wanted to be free to worship, to not feel the effects of living in a fallen world, to not be conscious of the 50 years since his brother’s execution, but he couldn’t. Into that situation came the Christ: ***“I heard a loud voice like a trumpet… I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone ‘like a son of man,’ dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.”***

We are so used to computer generated imaging in high budget movies that this doesn’t make an impression. Yet if we can unlink this vision from the unreality of the screen…

Have you ever stood before a world-changer? These people are so rare that probably none of us have. When I say “world changer”, I mean that one in a hundred million person. A person not like you or me. He has an incredibly disciplined mind; an ability to see through people, to appraise them, to utilize people in a way that fits his plans for the world and he isn’t afraid to use you for his purposes; a person whose mere glance feels like law. Oh, we like to imagine other people don’t intimidate us. But there are those few who do. You stand before this man and you know you are inferior in will and power. Yet that “world changer” whose glance makes you flinch is just a human being without a brilliantly shining face, dazzling white hair, without a literally thundering voice, or stars floating above the palm of his hand. What if you came face-to-face with a man like that? Wouldn’t you freak out? John says, ***“When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.”***

Then this “world changer” does something that those who make world history don’t do. ***“Then he placed his right hand on me and said: ‘Don’t be afraid.’”*** His plan is not for the world (well, actually it is), but in his plan is a place for John, and me, and you. ***“Don’t be afraid,”*** Jesus said to John, to me, to you.

When John heard those words, ***“Do not be afraid,”*** a flash of memory crossed his mind—familiar words from a familiar voice. At least half a dozen different times, when Jesus walked the earth with John and eleven others in tow, Jesus had said, ***“Do not be afraid.”*** “Yes,” John thought, “that is the Jesus I know. The one with the power to stop the wind and waves. The one who orders the fish of the sea into the net. The Jesus who shone like lightning on the mount of Transfiguration.” And old man John exhales and exults.

It is the voice of our Savior speaking to you, whether you are frightened by Coronavirus or not; whether you are stressed out about your children and their future or not; whether you are on death’s doorstep or the doorstep of your first job interview; in a car accident or a foxhole. Or if like John you wonder if you are going to be the twelfth of the Twelve to die a violent death. ***“Do not be afraid.”***

Jesus says this convincingly. He does not speak like the people of this world and their nonsense reasons to not fear: “We’ll all get through this together.” Well, no we won’t. Tens of thousands will die. “You can do it!” Well, maybe you can, but maybe I can’t! When Jesus says, “Don’t fear!” he backs it up with a reason to not fear. That reason is intimately tied up with Easter: ***“I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.”***

He is The Living One. He did battle with sin and death. In dying Jesus did battle with sin and kicked sin to the curb. In rising from the dead, he kicked death to the curb. He is the one who holds the keys to death and Hades. Like a keyholder holding the only key, Jesus decides the moment of death, and he decides where people will be sent after death. None enter it but by his permission. None enter hell, or for that matter, heaven, unless he, the key holder allows it. All who trust in his saving work ought not fear.

But this world does not understand the hope Easter gives. I say this by way of warning you of those who downgrade Easter into only some kind of hope parade, a symbol without power. One pastor in New York City, where a thousand people are dying each day from the epidemic said this about his Easter sermon: “This is an opportunity for us to hang out in the tragedy of Good Friday.”[[1]](#footnote-1) I’ve got to hand it to him. He knows how to package a message, but that is an appalling Easter message. Now I know that sometimes, especially when it comes to religious messages, news media report what they want, rather than what a pastor intended. That having been said—if that is what that pastor thought… that Good Friday is somehow about human suffering… turn in your clergy card, please! If that pastor thinks that the very real tragedy of tens of thousands of people dying somehow negates Easter? Please stop pretending you are a Christian! Easter comforts us specifically when thousands die! It has always been so with the Christian faith!

Jesus tells us to not fear because Easter is the message of death’s defeat and eternal life for his people. Through faith in him, we are forgiven. We are clothed in his righteousness and therefore cherished by God. Eternity is ours. That lifts our eyes in hope off the worries of this world, to our Living Savior.

Hear it. Believe it. Smile. Breathe deeply. It’s Easter.

**Christ is the Victor!**

1. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52232384 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)