

Everything has changed. I keep trying to think of anything else I've encountered in my lifetime that has changed so many aspects of my life. I hardly do a thing these days without thinking about covid19. Our lives have been changed forever by this. We use terms like "social distancing," these days, terms that would have made little sense before the past few weeks. And while I make every attempt to find the silver lining in these days, it still feels like a big, dark cloud hangs over everything.

These changes become even more pronounced when we come to celebrations like Easter, one of those times when getting together is kind of the point of it all. I'm alone while I'm preaching this, which pushes the weirdo-meter off the charts. One of the things I love about preaching on Easter is the energy of a sanctuary packed with people. Yet here I sit, preaching to my iphone.

In Psalm 137 we read the lament of those taken into exile in Babylon: *How can we sing the LORD's songs in a foreign land?* Likewise, how can we celebrate Easter when we cannot gather together for worship? And how can we sing "Jesus Christ Is Risen Today" when we cannot gather to join our voices in praise? How can I say the words, "Christ is risen!" without hearing the resounding chorus, "Christ is risen, **indeed!**"

The first year after Vicki died was marked by certain events – birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas...and Easter – where the pain of grief was significantly greater. I feel like that today. The message – the Good News! – that we celebrate today is feeling a bit hollow, like maybe I'm just whistling in the dark. Sure, we say we believe that Christ is risen, but do we really? Does the testimony of a handful of woman and a couple of disciples really ring true today? Do you really believe that it's true? Because it sounds too good to be.

A few years ago David Lose wrote something for Easter that I absolutely fell in love with. It was originally posted as a video but I have transcribed it and will read it to you. Before I do that, however, I want you to understand how he wrote this. It is a series of phrases that is read from the top to the bottom; when read that way it sounds like Easter is a false hope. But then, when read from the bottom to the top, it sounds completely different. And the difference is whether you believe the witness of the women who went to the tomb is true or not. Here it is:

### **Easter is coming**

But for many of us this is not the ultimate reality

There is too much pain and suffering in the world today

Death has the last word

It would therefore be foolish to say that

The life and death of a first-century Jew named Jesus makes a difference

Why  
Might makes right  
Power is superior to compassion and  
Despair is stronger than hope  
So I refuse to believe  
A man can come back from the dead  
Sometimes the most important facts are the hardest to accept  
Resurrection is a false hope  
How can you say  
An empty tomb changes everything  
Don't you see  
"God loves the world"  
Is a lie  
"Money is God"  
And  
"The one who dies with the most toys wins"  
I will tell you what I tell my children  
There is no more to this world than you can see, hold and buy  
There is no mystery in everyday life and  
There is nothing sacred about ordinary things and people  
Many of us simply do not believe that  
God can give life to the dead, bring light from darkness, and create something  
out of nothing

**But what if the testimony of the women at the tomb was true? Then...**

David Lose  
*Author of Making Sense of Scripture*

One of the things I really miss this Easter is a game that I would play in my sermon. I would tell the congregation that I would slip in the phrase, "Christ is risen," in my sermon, sometimes when you least expect it. When I say that phrase, I expect to get the response: Christ is risen indeed! Besides being a lot of fun (for me at least!) I do this because **I** need to hear the good news as well! Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote,

*Christians are persons who no longer seek their salvation, their deliverance, their justification in themselves, but in Jesus Christ alone. They know that God's Word in Jesus Christ pronounces them guilty, even when they feel nothing of their own guilt, and that God's Word in Jesus Christ pronounces them free and righteous, even*

*when they feel nothing of their own righteousness ... [So] 'they watch for this Word wherever they can. Because they daily hunger and thirst for righteousness, they long for the redeeming Word again and again ... **The Christ in their own hearts is weaker than the Christ in the word of other Christians. Their own hearts are uncertain; those of their brothers and sisters are sure. At the same time, this also clarifies that the goal of all Christian community is to encounter one another as bringers of the message of salvation.**' (emphasis mine)*

You see, if Christ is risen (that would be a time for you to shout, "Christ is risen, indeed!), that means that death no longer needs to be feared, and if death no longer needs to be feared, what is there to fear? This. Changes. Everything. Even more than covid19! But it's so hard to hang onto, to really believe it, so I need you, my dear sisters and brothers, to help the uncertainty in my own heart, as Bonhoeffer put it. So, even though I can't hear you, let's close with the acclamation of the day:

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!  
**(Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!)**