

For me, as I am sure it is for you as well, this is an Easter celebration like none other that I have ever been a part of. Whereas normally we would be dressing up in our finest, and filling our churches on this glorious day, we find ourselves, instead, parked in front of our computer screens or other mobile devices, doing our best to be “together apart”.

This past week has been a particularly challenging one for those of us, not just here in the United States, but around the world. With the coronavirus pandemic claiming thousands of lives each day, and the stories of chronic shortages of lifesaving supplies, and tales of medical staffs being forced to make unthinkable choices about who will live and who will die, we have been compelled to come face-to-face with countless moments of tragedy and unexpected death – especially during this Holy Week, when Christians throughout the world have commemorated the final days, culminating in the crucifixion, of Jesus. All of these stories are a not-so-subtle reminder that death always seems to be lurking, right around the corner.

Truth be told, we have to deal with death all of the time in our lives... and it's not just the physical death of someone we know or love, or even the knowledge of our own impending death someday. We also have to deal with the countless “little deaths” which come our way each day as well... that kind of death which accompanies the end of a relationship, or the loss of a job, or the realization that some hope or dream will never come true, or retirement, or moving to a new community, or the transition from one phase of life to another, or the awareness

that your kids are growing up right before your eyes and they're losing a bit more of their innocence with each passing day, or the awareness that your parents getting old right before your eyes and they're losing a bit more of their connection to you and all of life with each passing day. Yes, death is upon us... and around us... and among us... even on Easter morning.



Of all the different symbols for Easter, both religious and non-religious, perhaps the most familiar is the Easter lily. Indeed, its bright white color reminds us of the brightness and joy of the season. And its flower, shaped like a trumpet, proclaims, like the angel, the resurrection of our Lord. But despite its long standing as the most well-known symbol of the season, the lily really isn't an Easter flower at all. In fact, it has to be tricked by its grower into blooming at this time of year. And its flower, which many of you know, is so very delicate and fragile, and after only a few days will start to fade and die away.



There is, however, another flower which seems much more suited to be the symbol of the resurrection. It too recalls the bright Easter event with its brilliant yellow face. But unlike the lily, the dandelion – at least to me – is the true flower of the resurrection. As many of us who spend time working in our yards and gardens can attest, the dandelion is ubiquitous, and indomitable, and virtually indestructible. Unlike the lily, dandelions are with us throughout the year. And

did you know that you can pluck a dandelion from your yard, and the root will grow a new flower, and the flower will grow a new root. In fact, the dandelion is so determined to grow and to live, that it will move rocks, pavement, even concrete to reach the light of day. The lily might recall some of the beauty of the Easter event... but certainly it is the dandelion which proclaims the persistence, and the tenacity, and the undeniable victory of God in Christ, who would not be overcome, who would not be denied, even by death itself. As the dandelion reminds us, Easter is about saying “Yes” to life... even in the face of death. God has persevered. The cold, harsh reality of death will not have the final say, but goodness and life and light will prevail. As we will sing in our closing song today at the end of our service, “Death is conquered. We are free. Christ has won the victory.”

For much of our early church history, Easter was the one date of the entire year set aside for doing baptisms. Candidates had a three-year period of preparation, after which they would finally be invited into the full life of the faith community. That preparation would culminate on Easter, as they received this gift of new life, just as the community was celebrating the new and resurrected life of Jesus Christ.

Baptism is a holy and powerful act, linking us to the fullness of the experience of Jesus. During the blessing of the baptismal water in the Episcopal tradition, we say, “We thank you for the water of baptism. In it, we are buried with Christ in his death.”

But the story doesn’t end there... for we then go on to say, “By it, we share in his resurrection.” As Christians we recognize the presence of death in our lives.

But as Christians, we also recognize that God can use even death to bring forth new life. In the face of sometimes seemingly insurmountable odds, today we proclaim that death is not the end... death is not the winner... even death shall be overcome. As St. Paul tells us in 1st Corinthians, “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”

I have a niece who is now in her 30’s named Christine. Many years ago now, when she was about seven years old, Christine was in Brownies – one of the early levels of being a Girl Scout. Christine’s Brownie troop was going to be celebrating International Women’s Day, where all of the girls were asked to dress up as a representative of a different culture. Christine decided that she wanted to represent the Maasai people of eastern Africa. Well... my sister, being the good Brownie mom that she was, found a picture of a Maasai woman in her traditional dress, and used some old curtains to fashion an outfit for Christine. When it was finished, Christine disappeared into her bedroom to put on her costume, and with great fanfare came out into the living room to model her creation. Her arms held wide, and beaming from ear to ear, she spun around in a circle and declared: “I think I look just like the Messiah.”

I am reminded today that, by virtue of our baptism, each one of us here today looks just like the messiah.

For, as the writer of the Book of Romans reminds us: “If we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”

One of the classic formulas in our eucharistic liturgy is called the “Memorial Acclamation”. The priest invites that acclamation by saying, “Therefore we proclaim the mystery of faith” to which the congregation responds:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

One statement is a past event. One is a present event. And one is a future event. It is no small distinction that Christ’s death is an event in the past... but that his resurrection is a present reality – not something simply assigned to the pages of history.

As a person receives Christ into their life for the first time, Christ is risen. As we re-affirm our faith time and time again, Christ is risen. As we reach out in Christian love to one who has fallen by the wayside, Christ is risen. As we work for a lasting peace throughout the world, Christ is risen. As we present to God our selves, our souls and bodies, Christ is risen. When we carry the light of Christ to those who live in darkness, Christ is risen. When the hungry are fed, when the naked are clothed, when the poor are lifted up, when the unlovable are loved, Christ is risen. In every act that you or I do that shows to the world that God is present and active among us, Christ... is... risen.

That, to me, is the meaning of Easter... that hope is stronger than memory... that the empty tomb is stronger than the naked cross... that light is stronger than darkness... that the day is stronger than the night... that life is stronger than death. Today, may you experience the gift of Easter. And today, may you be the bearer of the gift of Easter as well. For Christ is risen. Alleluia... and Amen.