

**Has Everything Changed.....?**  
**Matthew 28: 1-10**  
**Don Lincoln**

This past Wednesday a church member was reflecting on our weekly Wednesday morning chapel service, which is part of his regular worship. It's a brief, 20-minute service where we have been celebrating "virtual communion" – we've told folks to use whatever you have handy at home for communion elements, to celebrate with us.

He emailed Wednesday morning to say all he had in the house was Diet Coke and Cheez-its, and he hoped that was OK. I emailed back and said that was just fine. He later responded to me, saying, "The only challenge I had was eating **just one** Cheez-it!" These **HAVE** been different days!

And for sure, all week long, colleagues, friends, strangers, bloggers, newscasters, Facebookers and everyone else have been declaring how different this Holy Week and Easter would be.

The only thing the same in this live meditation and the video clips from last Easter is I'm wearing the same pink tie. Everything else seems different. The parking lot has 8 cars in it. Not one person is seated in a pew in front of me. It's VERY different than any of the other 39 Easter Sundays since I've been a pastor.

Rather than bright flowers and colored eggs, the season is ripe with fear and anxiety, overrun by separation and loneliness, untold numbers suffering from illness, job loss, economic uncertainty and even death. There is a global havoc the likes of which have not been seen for generations.

And yet, as Charles Dickens writes, in *A Tale of Two Cities*, "It was the best of times, and the worst of times...." Because in the midst of the worst, we've seen some of the best.

Actor and film producer John Krasinski, in his new series titled "Some Good News," highlights some of the best of what we've seen. Healthcare workers, putting their health, even their lives on the line; without expecting so much as a thank you. And yet there has unfolded a **global outbreak** of thank-you's – 7:00pm daily applause in NYC. A fleet of police cars lined up outside a suburban hospital, turning on blue lights as a visible celebration of gratitude to the staff inside.

The generous, grateful spirit is exhibited everywhere. One man has put stacks of toilet paper and cases of hand sanitizer in his open garage, with a sign for the delivery folks who are coming almost daily bringing him necessities that says: "Free if you need some." A delivery man is stunned, as he holds a pack of toilet paper, and says, "I can have these? Really? Thank you so much – this is a lifesaver!"

A man in Maine bought 100 lobsters to help a lobsterman stay afloat, then gave the lobsters away to his neighbors. A college student has designed face masks with a see-through window of plastic for the deaf and hard of hearing who read lips. Creativity.

And Krasinski shows a poignant video of an elderly man, who would not allow quarantine to stop him, standing outside the window of his bedridden wife's room in a nursing home, and listening to the two of them – her inside, him outside – together singing “Amazing Grace.”

Countless large AND small acts of kindness, illustrating the best of the human spirit. Such are the possibilities. We **CAN** be changed, and that's the point of resurrection – transformation and change.

Don't misunderstand me. Resurrection is cataclysmic – completely beyond human imagining. According to Matthew it involves earthquakes, and dumbstruck guards, an angel in blinding array rolling away a massive stone. It's cataclysmic.

Then the women are instructed to look at the newly opened, empty tomb. And in so doing, what are they supposed to understand?

The women are to understand that resurrection is not about human capacities or possibilities. Resurrection does not happen because good people just keep trying harder. Resurrection is wholly God's capacity and determination; resurrection **is about God**.

If death – as the final conclusion to even the most finely lived life – is to be transcended and conquered, it is not because of whatever goodness you and I conjure up. It is because God acts at that boundary of life we call death, and does something altogether new in Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> **God raises Jesus from the dead!**

But I ask you, how can that have happened and it not also be about us? How can that **NOT** change you and me?? It surely changed those first disciples. For without God's resurrecting Jesus, there is no way to explain the birth of the church. Without the resurrection, they would've had nothing to tell and nothing to do. The disciples' lives were changed – radically – right then and there.

But somewhere along the way believers began to think resurrection was only about eternal life. Friends, resurrection is not about you and me being promoted from life to something more than life.

It's about you and me being converted from something **less than life** to the possibility of full life – **right now**. Empowered to live – no longer paralyzed by fear of evil; no longer chained like a prisoner to the destructive ways of lording it over one another; no longer having to spend all our energy and resources to maintain the haves in having, and the have-nots in only dreaming; no longer anxious about what the world gives, “....for not as the world gives give I unto you,” says Jesus.

Resurrection is about you and me being resurrected to a new way of living and thinking – **no matter WHAT pandemic is infecting the world**, be it COVID-19, or greed, or prejudice, or hate. This world is filled with **disease**, and will continue to be, even after we get a vaccine for this one.

But thanks be to God, Jesus, the Great Physician, came to cure all that ails us. And because of His death and resurrection, you and I are sent by Jesus, just as the women in the story are sent, to be on the front line, inoculating every place and person and institution with the Good News and the **GOOD WAYS** of the Risen Christ.

He is alive so **WE** can be alive – **fully** alive; **fully** human – as God has always intended us to be – right here; right now.

We have seen glimpses of what the human spirit is capable of in the midst of this crisis – but you and I are to go and meet Jesus out in front, leading through and beyond this crisis, and invite the world to join us. For there will always be a crisis. Sin and brokenness are just as alive and real as this virus is. The Good News is ALL their power has been crucified on the cross.

You and I are to be witnesses to what God has done in Jesus for the whole world, so the whole world might start acting like it's one human family at ALL times – in love and grace and equity and welcome and hospitality and neighborliness and forgiveness – **at ALL times**, rather than only – ONLY -when we're so visibly overrun by outside forces.

You and I ask a lot of things from God. But what more could you really want from God than the promise that neither sin nor death gets the last word? Would you ask for riches over that? Health over that? A vaccine OVER that? Or will you celebrate with me today that God has done what we cannot imagine. By being raised from the dead, God has taken death's sting from us.

And God didn't do it just so you and I can see our loved ones in eternity. God did it so you and I can also do all the living and loving and serving and justice producing work RIGHT NOW – because we need not worry about the time to come. God has taken care of that already!

Yes, this Easter is different. Different from all the Easters we have known – except perhaps, the first one. On that first Easter, there were no crowds. There was no organ playing; no trumpeting brass. A very small group – less than 10 – a couple women, an angel and some sleeping guards were all that attended that first Easter. The rest of Jesus' friends were hunkered down in isolation and fear, cloistered in a home with the door locked for their safety. Sounds familiar.

Although it may not be the Easter you and I planned, the good news is still true: Christ is alive. And because of that, you and I can be too.

Do not be afraid! Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed!

1. Cameron Murchison, in *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Vol 2, Lent through Eastertide*.