

April 7, 2020 – Tuesday of Holy Week

Dearest Saints in Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ, who is our Passover lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7), slaughtered for our sins (1 Peter 1:19).

Social distancing has made the past several weeks seem like an eternity. It is difficult not being able to spend time socializing, finding entertainment on an evening ‘out on the town,’ and certainly gathering together for corporate worship. Distancing means that even those who have family in close proximity can find themselves lonely, anxious, and depressed. We were not built for social distancing. We were built to live in close community.

This is one reason why we value corporate worship as much as we do. There is a certain comfort from being able to gather together each week with like-minded people who share in a common confession. But, the Church is no social club. The Church is the Body of Christ! When we gather together, we do so around the Word of God, hearing again a call to repentance and a sweet word of grace and forgiveness in Christ. We gather around the gifts of God, who washes away our sins in Holy Baptism and feeds us with the body and blood of Jesus Christ in the Lord’s Supper. *This is why it is so hard to forgo corporate worship – because along with the separation that comes from social distancing, we are being forced to fast from the flesh and blood of Jesus.*

Add to all of it that this is week is Holy Week, and it is understandable why it will be an emotionally difficult week for many Christians. The solemnness of this week and the beauty of the services are truly special gifts within the Church. On Maundy Thursday, we remember the institution of the Lord’s Supper. At the end of the service, we hear Psalm 22 chanted as the altar is stripped. On Good Friday, we hear again the account of Jesus’ Passion and death on the cross, where he died for the sins of the world. Before leaving in silence, we hear the *strepitus*, the loud sound which reminds us of the tomb of Jesus being shut by the stone.

With no way to gather safely for these services, we are reminded again of the severity of the current plague, which itself is a call for us to remember our sin and mortality. But, we will continue to do all that we can to share in God’s Word during this most holy week for Christians. Services will be streamed/recorded, and sermon manuscripts will be available. Devotions have been sent out and are free for use whenever you are able. Certainly, all of it does not make up for us not being able to gather. But, we can still find comfort in knowing that, every time we hear God’s Word, his Spirit is working faith in our hearts. Just as Jesus said, *where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them* (Matthew 18:20).

I wrote earlier that these few weeks have seemed like an eternity. But, when it is all over, it will simply be a blip in history (not that it makes the present any less difficult!). The fact is, we *know* what eternity will be like. We have already received a taste of it. This Sunday, we recount the turning point in history – the day Jesus was raised from the dead! The apostle Paul wrote, *In fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep*

(1 Corinthians 15:20). There is no doubt about it – Jesus, who was once dead, is alive! Even more, he is but the first. *For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ, the firstfruits, then at this coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death (15:22-26).* When eternity comes, it will indeed be more wonderful than we can imagine now. It will be a time of resurrection and new life. It will be a time when we can see Jesus with our own eyes (real eyes!). It will be a time when God dwells with us, his people, for all time. It will be a time when sickness and pain, mourning and crying, death and sorrow will be no more (Revelation 21:4).

For now, we – with the crowds on Palm Sunday – can only shout *Hosanna! Save us!* For now, we can only ask with the Psalmist, *How long, O Lord?* For now, we can only fall on our knees in prayer – like the father of the demon-possessed boy (Mark 9:24) – and cry out *I believe! Help my unbelief!* For now. But, dear Christians, take heart! Jesus, your Lord, says, *Surely I am coming soon!* (Revelation 22:20). And, with the Church, we confess, *Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!* For when he comes, the eternity we experience will be joy. And it will be peace.

In Hope,
Pastor Squire