

## The Rev. Kerith Harding's Easter 2020 Sermon

For about five days earlier in this week there was a post-it note on my desk with the phone number of a couple who wanted to talk to me. I didn't know them, Janet took the message, and so the post-it note sat until I could get through some St. John's-related issues and steal a few moments. It was on my "To do" list, for sure, but it took me a few days to return their call; other tasks seemed more pressing.

I finally snuck back to my office one night after dinner and called them. They were *immediately grateful* for the call, in no way put out it took me days to reply. "Our daughter," the man began haltingly, "she died last week. And I was wondering if you could pray for her. She struggled but she was a really good woman, and I just wonder if you could ask God to make an exception this time."

In a split second I understood what he was asking. He and his wife were asking me to appeal to God on their behalf. They simply wanted me to pray. They were, like many of us of certain generations, accustomed to an older, out-of-date theology that falsely taught for way too many years that God does not forgive people who — in anguish and in pain - cut short their own lives. That God doesn't shower them with love as God does all the others living and deceased.

And for five days they waited for a call from me to assure them their child was indeed ok, that she was out of pain, **that she was better than ok**, and that she was wrapped in God's tender, compassionate arms.

Had I known that this was the nature of the phone call, I would not have let the post-it sit on my desk for five days. It would have taken priority; my response would have been urgent. It would have been immediate. I sat in silence at my desk for awhile, absorbing that fact. Five days.

In this morning's Gospel, we see this urgent, immediate love of God in action.

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary go to the tomb at the first morning light and are greeted by a trembling earthquake and an angel descending in a sight so frightful the guards pass out from fear. "Do not be afraid," the angel says to the women. "I know that you are looking for Jesus who was

crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples. He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.”

And the women run to tell their friends. With great fear and great joy. With urgency they run. The sequence of events was made clear by the angel: tell the other followers and then go to Galilee where you will see Jesus. That's where he will meet you. Galilee was about 70 miles away, a journey of several days on foot: three if they went through Samaria, five if they walked around it. Five days until they could see for themselves and know with full assurance that their close friend, their brother, their Lord, had risen from the dead. **That he was better than ok.**

Five days. It can be an unbearably long period of time.

It should not fully surprise us, then, that Jesus rips up the script that says he must meet the women and his disciples in five days in Galilee. Before they can even get to the others, Jesus meets them on the road. “Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” Matthew’s Gospel tells us. He simply couldn’t wait. His love is too urgent, too immediate.

I, in my limited humanity, did not know the pain this couple was in when they called me. Not so with God. God knows already, deep down, beyond our denials and avoidance tactics, just how anxious, frightened, and exhausted we are.

Five days was just too long then, and it’s too long now.

Here, in the middle of a pandemic, we too, I suspect, have scripted for ourselves our own Galilee. We have an idea of where and when we will *really feel and know* that it is Easter, that Jesus is risen, that love triumphs over death. We can picture it, and it’s in the distant future: when we can finally gather at the beach with friends, when we get the call that school is re-opening, when we hold our grandkids again, when we can visit our friend’s new babies, when we return to work. We can see it, and it is unbearably long time away. We are well past five days now, past 25 even, and there’s no end in sight.

So know this: Jesus is running to meet you now, here. Jesus is not able to sit back and wait for the scheduled reunion; *He is here*. Look, and you will

see. Knock, and it shall be opened. His love can't wait until the schedule tells us we can celebrate good news, whenever that is. He is in the tired rooms of your lonesome house, in the faces of the family members you are quarantined with, no matter how exhausting they have been to you, and you have been to them; he is wherever you find yourself. Not in some distant day where life is better, but here and now.

And if you don't see him there, *ask for eyes to see*. And look around you *with God's help*. He is already there in the astonishing heroism of medical staff who literally put their lives on the line to care for their patients. He is in the *more than routine* dedication of parents caring 24/7 for their kids, for adult children tending to their parents, of spouses offering each other kindness and forgiveness. He is in the outreach to neighbors, in the re-awakening of attention and value for the most vulnerable. He is in the outrage that socioeconomic injustice renders the African-American and Hispanic communities more susceptible to this virus. And He is in the return of contemplation, wonder, and curiosity. The return of quiet and simplicity.

If Jesus can't bear to wait five days, and the Gospel tells us he can't, he certainly can't bear to wait 35 or 75 or 105. *You* might be waiting to meet Him when this is all over, but He isn't. He has already shown up. And if this still feels too impossible, remember the blind man and simply say, "I want to see." Because, evidence of the Resurrection is everywhere.

Christ is Risen, my friends. Alleluia. And Amen.