



Sunday, March 27, 2016

Pastoral Letter – The Resurrection of Our Lord

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

On Easter Sunday we are invited to respond to Mary's amazing and wonderful news (John 20:1-18), news that she had seen the Lord! Mary's proclamation of joy and hope, of surprise and wonder at seeing the resurrected Lord, had a dramatic effect upon a gathering of grief-stricken and frightened disciples. In time it would transform them into a band of disciples confident that in Christ, God's grace is given to all as a free, unexpected, and unconditional gift.

This gift of grace evoked a response of gratitude, expressing itself in a loving and caring engagement with human beings and the whole of creation – a joining with God in God's mission of reconciliation, indeed, in the in-breaking of the Reign of God.

This Easter how are we touched by this unexpected news? And how might we respond to this gift of grace? What opportunities are before us to faithfully follow as disciples of the risen Lord? How might our response of gratitude be expressed?

Several continuing current events provide opportunities for living God's gift of grace in Christ:

Against a backdrop of despair faced by refugees who have fled for their lives from their crowded tombs of death, we have a unique opportunity to live into the Easter story, to roll away their entrapping stones by compassionately responding to one of the most pressing needs of our time. Thank you to each community of faith and each individual who has worked to welcome refugees to our communities.

Our full communion partners, the Anglican Church of Canada, will be engaging in thoughtful reflection and decision regarding their Marriage Canon at this summer's General Synod, July 7-12, in Toronto. What opportunities for prayer, for grace offered to all, will present themselves for loving and caring engagement with our Anglican sisters and brothers in local and broader contexts, so that all people can be surprised with life, as Mary was?

Within our own province there is an on-going debate, both in the public sphere and in the church, over children's rights and LGBTQ policies in schools. What conversations can we have that might offer us the opportunity as Lutheran Christians to express, through purposeful commitment, a resurrection love and care for one another in response to God's grace freely given?

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report – and particularly the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action* – invite us to walk alongside our sisters and brothers, listening and learning, and joining in God's mission of reconciliation. What might we do together to walk out of this tomb into a mutual resurrection for all of us?

Care for the earth, and particularly our own stewardship of resources, including land and water, provide momentum for considering our own footprint as we seek to live graciously alongside God's good creation. How might we be gardeners of life where others want to turn it into a graveyard?

And, the very present concern related to assisted death and the support of those who are ill, their loved ones, physicians and all medical professionals invites a vision of grace-filled conversation and loving care. How might we work to bring celebrations of life even in the midst of death?

As baptized disciples of the risen Lord we are assured that we are liberated by God's grace in Christ – freed from the law and freed for gracious living. And this life keeps breaking forth from death, in Christ's resurrection.

I have a favorite quote attributed to St. Francis taped to my computer screen. Its meaning I seek to be mindful of in my desire to follow our risen Lord: *In baptism we died the only death that matters, leaving us free to risk every other death for the sake of life.*

Buried and raised with Christ in the waters of baptism and marked with the sign of the cross, I am confident of God's love for me and for all in Christ and Christ's self-giving love. I am assured of the liberating grace of God in Christ which evokes a response of gratitude, expressing itself in loving and caring engagement with human beings and the whole of creation.

My Easter prayer this year is that all of us in the Synod of Alberta and the Territories may find new hope and much courage as we follow Christ passionately, joining God in God's mission in our world.

Let us respond with open and joyful hearts to the news that Mary brings to us this day: Jesus Christ is risen today! Alleluia!

Christ has died! Christ has risen! Christ will come again! Amen, Amen, and Amen!

"The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13).

Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Shalom,

+Larry Kochendorfer, Bishop

Synod of Alberta and the Territories

16 March 2016