



“Very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, ‘Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?’ When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back.” Mk 16:3-4

EASTER MESSAGE 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Diocese of Peterborough,

Christians around the world are celebrating a Holy Week and Easter quite unlike any in living memory. Given the realities of the COVID-19 global pandemic, with the loss of life, economic impacts, grief and social disruption that it has wrought, it may seem wrong to speak of celebrating. We are called, however, at this time more than ever, to live by a faith that proclaims the power of life over death and light over darkness. Indeed, this has been the task of the followers of Jesus from the very beginning.

The evangelist Mark captures the perplexity and anxiety of the women who went to the Lord’s tomb on Easter morning. Weighed down with grief at the brutal crucifixion and death of Jesus, they also had an immediate, practical concern: who would move aside the heavy stone blocking the entrance to the tomb? A typical tomb in Palestine was not fitted with a door, but sealed with a large circular stone, set into a groove. It would be no easy matter to move one. Yet when the women arrived, they found that the job had already been done. The stone had been pushed aside by an angelic being who told them that they were looking for Jesus in the wrong place. He had been raised from death to life, for no tomb could hold him. Their job was to do the “heavy lifting” of announcing this Good News to others, amazing and unexpected as it was.

“Who will roll away the stone for us?” More pertinent but equally anxious questions undoubtedly perplex us in these days of global pandemic. “When will this crisis be over?” “What will happen to my job, my income, my livelihood?” “What if the virus strikes me or someone close to me?” “How will the world be changed as a result of all this?” And for Christians everywhere there is the pressing question “When will we be able to gather again to be nourished by Word, Sacrament and community?”

It is only natural, in times of great social upheaval, that difficult questions should be asked. And people of faith are not immunized against suffering or anxiety in these disturbing times. But faith in a God of mercy and love certainly reframes those troubling questions for us. Faith in God who took on our human condition even to the point of death assures us that we are not alone in our suffering. Faith in God who has the power to bring life out of death encourages us to join in that work of moving stones and lifting the burdens that press down on people. Faith always assures us that it is by God’s grace and strength that we can bear even the heaviest burdens.

Let us not cease to pray for those who are leaning in to help all of society face this crisis: front-line health care providers, essential workers, public health officials and government leaders. Let us each be strong and vigilant in doing our part to battle this pandemic, by adhering to responsible practices and reaching out to others in compassion, love and care. Like the women who went to the tomb on Easter morning, we will accomplish more when we are united. And as those women went forth from the tomb on Easter day, let us as the Church go forward with a message of hope and encouragement, for it is one founded on the love of God, one that proclaims the victory of life over death, the triumph of hope over despair.

The disciples of Jesus celebrated that first Easter behind closed doors, and so it will be for us in this remarkable Easter of 2020. But closed doors could not keep the Lord Jesus out, any more than a heavy stone could seal him in, and closed doors do not extinguish our faith. We are confident that the Lord is with us during these difficult times, so much so that we are even bold enough to celebrate these Easter mysteries. And when the doors open again – as they certainly will – we look forward to celebrating as a community. Until then, may faith sustain us during this crisis, hope assure us of better times to come, and mutual love strengthen us to face the tasks that lie ahead, as a Church and society.

May God bless you and yours with much love and abundant faith in this Holy Week and Easter.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Daniel Miehm". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

+Most. Rev. Daniel Miehm
Bishop of Peterborough