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Dear Friends

Happy Easter!

The sanctuary of our church is greatly enhanced by the 14 stained glass windows that run along the side, seven on each side. For those unfamiliar with the history, the windows were our Millennium Project as the year 2000 approached. All of the windows were donated and the project took a few years to be completed but before any of that we invited a stained glass artist to work with us about possible themes and design. One of the things that she discovered from her conversations with us was that we were a congregation with a deep appreciation of the church year. With that in mind she presented a design that moves through the Christian calendar from beginning to end, from back to front. Though she never wanted to give titles to the windows, there is no doubt in my mind that the second from last window is the Easter Window.

It is my favourite window. My attention is always drawn to the round, white, textured, glistening globe on the left side. From it radiates circles of red, and orange, and yellow. I never know if the medallion is meant to be a stone rolled away or the heart of a rising sun. The artist would never say what she thought it was. And I suppose it is best this way. For the near the heart of Easter is mystery. The resurrection of Jesus calls forth our imaginations. It is up to each and every one of us to discern what this promise of new life means to us, how it will restore us to hope, how it will renew our lives, and how this particular celebration will be meaningful for us. The testimony of the Gospels and the testimony of the church is that Jesus is Risen. Together let us celebrate the Good News of Easter.

Musical Prelude

Enjoy a brief Easter Prelude from Carla and Brendan by clicking here: [Jesus Christ is Risen Today](#)

Reading

The Gospel lesson of the day is Matthew 28:1-10. You can read by clicking here: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+28%3A1-10&version=NRSV>

Reflection

A few years ago the Archbishop of Canterbury suggested that perhaps it was time for Easter to have a fixed date. This would simplify things. Families could plan ahead on a routine for Easter like they do for Christmas. People would know when Easter was relative to spring break and such. Life would be easier if Easter was on the same day every year. But it would also be less. At the heart of Easter is a mystery and that mystery is embodied by the movable date. Sometimes Easter is in April, sometimes it is in March. Some years Easter feels like a winter holiday, some years it feels like a spring one. (For those who are interested, the formula is that Easter is the first Sunday that follows the first full moon, that arises after the Spring equinox). It's easier just to look at the calendar for this year's date.

That movable-date reminds us that Easter is a mystery. It serves the idea that Easter surprises us. And that the promise of new life comes to us at almost any time. Recently I had been reading an interview with John Dominic Crossan, the celebrated biblical scholar. Crossan's latest book is about the resurrection and how the Eastern and Western traditions of the Christian Church have viewed it differently. Even the Gospels themselves resist telling the reader just how it was that Jesus was raised from the dead. Rather, they proceed immediately to tell how witnesses came to believe the good news and share it with others. So it is left to the imagination of artists to depict what might have happened. Crossan found in his travels and studies that early Christian artists in the east tended to show something that the west did not. In Western Christianity, the risen Jesus is typically shown alone, standing hale and hearty beside an empty tomb. However, Crossan found that in Turkey, and in Russia, Romania, and Egypt, that early Christian artists invariably showed the resurrection by displaying Jesus hand in hand with Adam and Eve leading them out of Hades. In other words, the earliest Christian testimony places a greater emphasis on the idea that the resurrection is a story of salvation for all humankind, that Jesus is never separated from the people that God so loves.

We come to Easter this year in a very peculiar time in our history. For many of us we have never lived through something like before. But Easter is an opportunity to remember what it is people of faith have available to lift us above our fear, and to set aside our anxiety, and to restore us to hope that this moment will pass and that there will be new life.

In the Gospel of Matthew it is Mary of Magdala and a woman called the other Mary who come to the tomb early on the first day of the week. It is a story punctuated with accounts of fear. Matthew says that following an earthquake, an angel descends from heaven and rolls away the stone. It causes such fear in the guards placed there that they pass out like dead men. The angel turns to address Mary and Mary and after announcing that Jesus is risen, tells them to not be afraid. They leave that place and on the path they meet the risen Christ who again says to them, "Do not be afraid."

But I want you to hear very carefully just what it was Mary and Mary were being told not to be afraid of. For though fear runs through the story, neither the angel nor Jesus tells them to fear not things of this world. Rather Mary and Mary are told to not be afraid that the promises of God are true. Do not be afraid that life is stronger than death. Do not be afraid that love can triumph over anything. And most of all, do not be afraid that your hearts can be healed and that joy can return to your daily living.

This is the message of Easter. Yes, do not be afraid of the things which we are rightfully anxious about. But neither be not afraid of the power of God to help us overcome this moment and any moment where fear enters in. There is new life. The ancients remind us, Jesus accompanies the human family in his new life so that we may know, wherever there is love, he is present.

Musical Offering

Enjoy a rendition of Lord of the Dance from Carla and Brendan by clicking here: [Lord of the Dance](#)

May the blessings of Easter and the promise of New Life abound.

Grace and peace,

Michael