

Easter reflections- April 12th, 2020. Lenore Hammers

Hello. My name is Lenore Hammers. I have been a member of St. John's since I first came to New Haven in the Fall of 1993. Over the years I have served in almost every capacity there is to serve. At the moment I am serving as the head of the altar guild, as well as singing in both choir and worship band.

It's a great honor to offer a reflection for the first week of Easter. Today we mark the end of the Lenten season. And, as our friend Chet Duke has observed, this year has been the lentiest of Lents most of us can remember. The global Covid 19 pandemic has meant that most of us have been shut up in our houses for the past several weeks, with no immediate end in sight. Everyone has had their lives disrupted in some way or another. We are all living in some fear, for ourselves and for our loved ones. Some of us have even lost people. We are missing important milestones, like graduations, weddings, funerals, as well as every day gatherings. Our sense of shared sacrifice, all around the world, is immense.

At this time in Connecticut, it honestly feels like Lent hasn't ended. As the head of the altar guild and a member of the music ministry, this is usually a busy and festive time for me. Any other year would find me fetching flowers, putting up candles, hanging linens, and attending multiple musical rehearsals. We've had none of that this year. A few weeks ago, as the order to suspend all gatherings dragged on because of the virus, it dawned on me that Easter would most likely be cancelled this year. That was a startling revelation for me.

This very strange time in which we are living brings new meaning to our gospel readings, and their accounts of the resurrection of Jesus. We are given the choice to read either the passage from Matthew 28:1-10 or John 20:1-18. I read them both, and was struck by the similarities, but also the differences, in the two accounts.

Matthew's account of the resurrection is a splashy and triumphant affair. The earth shakes, and an angel comes down like lightning, in blazing white, rolls the stone away from the tomb of Jesus, and sits on it. The angel announces to Mary that Jesus has risen from the dead, just as He promised. In John's account, Mary comes to the tomb and finds it empty, and runs back to tell the disciples that someone has stolen the body of Jesus. They all see the empty tomb, but don't quite know what to make of the situation at first. It's only a little while later that Jesus appears to Mary and she recognizes Him as the risen Lord.

What is similar in both accounts is Mary. She has come to the grave of Jesus at a dark time, both literally and spiritually. She has witnessed her beloved Rabbi betrayed, beaten, crucified and dead just three days ago. When she goes to the tomb, early in the morning when it was still dark, her only expectation was to find the body of Jesus and to tend to it. She did not expect the Resurrection. Of course she is overwhelmed, and terrified. But Jesus steps in to help her understand that all the sadness, defeat and despair are gone. In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells her "do not be afraid". In the gospel of John, he asks her "why do you weep?" As she realizes that truth, that Jesus is not dead but risen from the dead, the gospel of Matthew tells us she is filled with fear but also with great joy.

So, as we come to this Easter service, let's walk in Mary's footsteps. Whether you have had a spiritually rich Lenten season and now are filled with boisterous joy, or feel like you're just trying to make it through, or somewhere in between, take heart. Because of course, Easter can never be

cancelled. Jesus has conquered crucifixion and death. Our world has seen other times of pestilence, wars, and disaster over the years, and the church is still here. Jesus is still risen. Why are you weeping? Do not be afraid. This terrible time will pass. We will all get through it together. Our Lord is not dead, He is Risen! The Lord is risen, indeed! Hallelujah!

Let's pray:

Almighty God, who through your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ overcame death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life; Grant that we, who celebrate with joy the day of the Lord's resurrection, may be raised from the death of sin by your life-giving Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.