



**SAINT THOMAS CHURCH FIFTH AVENUE**  
in the City of New York  
*The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, Rector*  
[www.SaintThomasChurch.org](http://www.SaintThomasChurch.org)

**Sunday, April 12, 2020**  
*The Sunday of the Resurrection*

*Solemn Eucharist*  
*at 8:00 a.m.*

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A Sermon by  
The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, *Rector*  
*on*  
Romans 6:3-11, Colossians 3:1-4, and John 20:1-18  
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**“You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”**

I have been reflecting on the virtual-reality world that most of us have been inhabiting over the past few weeks. In New York, it is commonplace to do things electronically – from ordering groceries to take-out food. Corporate businesses use conference calls routinely. Yet, now we seem to inhabit a world interfaced via a computer screen or mobile device. It means that we are becoming used to communicating in a different kind of way and I am worried that we might get so used to it that things will never go back to the way they were. Take the video-casting of our services during Lent and Holy Week for example; what if people get so used to ‘virtual-church’ from the comfort of their armchair that they continue with it going forward? The leaflet that you can download for this service contains rubrics for standing, sitting, and kneeling but are we forgetting how to use our bodies and our sense to pray? I know that some of you have tried to enter into the worship by preparing the room and thinking about posture (one of you even sent me a picture of a thurible being prepared to burn incense!) however, the flip side of that is that you can now turn off the preacher and skip to the best bits of the liturgy! There is something unreal about our worship during Holy Week this year and that unreality is, for me, represented by the empty pews in front of me. To be the Church – to be the Body of Christ – means that we gather together, gather as family, gather as Christ’s flock. When the day comes that the Governor of the State lifts the shelter at home policy, will we have forgotten how to gather as the Body of Christ?

And the term ‘virtual’ is a strange one; we use it to describe all our activities via the internet and, yet, so many of those activities are not virtual – the Sunday School, the Vestry meeting, the coffee hour, the daily worship, the classes – they are not virtual, they are very real interactions of real people in real time. Will this period of isolation have dulled our sense of reality?

**You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.**

On this Easter Day, we claim the reality that is being tested through this period of isolation one from another. Today, on this Easter Day, we need more than ever to hear the story of the resurrection. This is not a virtual reality; “*God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.*” (John 3:17)

As Father Victor Austin, former Theologian in Residence here, once said: “*A human being who was dead, now is not. This has never happened before. We need to wonder, we must wonder, we must rethink everything. A dead man is alive.*”

*We can speak of him in the present tense. We can even in some strange way speak to him. Everything we've thought must now be changed."* (March 26, 2016 at the Easter Vigil)

On the day of Resurrection, everything changed; our relationship with God; our relationship with one another; our relationship with the world we inhabit; our understanding of where we are going on our journey of life.

On Maundy Thursday, Mother Turner commented on a question raised by one of our children when discussing the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday. In reflecting on how the Eucharist was inaugurated and has continued ever since, obeying the command of Jesus to 'do this in remembrance of me', the child said, "Why don't we call it the *first* supper?" That pivotal event marked the beginning of the end of the old era – the old covenant – and became the bridge to a new age. There is, of course, liturgically, a wonderful connection between Maundy Thursday and Good Friday when the sacrament consecrated at the Mass of the Lord's Supper then becomes our communion at the Celebration of the Lord's Passion and Death. As Paul says in the earliest account we have of the institution of the Eucharist, "*For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*" (1 Corinthians 11:26). The Last supper becomes the first supper in the new age which becomes a reality on the Day of Resurrection. The Holy Three Days that we have just celebrated are a continuum of God's saving power. The Passover Meal ushers in a new Exodus – a new deliverance from slavery – only this time, the deliverance is for *all* people – and a deliverance from past wrongs and from all sin. As we sang at the Easter Vigil in the Easter Proclamation, "*O happy fault, O necessary sin of Adam, which gained for us so great a Redeemer!*"

And how significant that Jesus rises on Sunday, the first day of the week in the creation story of Genesis. Only, this is a *new* creation – a new age is dawning – when all things will be made new. For Eastern orthodox Christians, Easter Sunday is described as the *Eighth Day!*

Everything has changed. Nothing will be the same again.

Over the past few weeks, I have heard lots of talk on the news and in conversations about things returning to normal. For some of us, a return to normality seems hard to grasp when, just before Easter, around 16 million Americans filed for unemployment. Will things ever be the same again?

I was sent a post on social media by a social worker who works not far from us here. I found her words deeply moving and, perhaps on this Easter Day, as I preach to an empty Church and to those of you watching or listening via your devices at home, it may also inspire you. She said this:

*"I have been meditating on the words I've continuously heard "things will be back to normal by...".*

*The truth is, I pray they do not "go back to normal". Normal is what got us here. If we do not internalize the lessons this crisis has taught us, that there is another way of being, we are doomed as a country and a world.*

*I am not being hyperbolic. We have mistreated our earth and each other, neglected our own communities' basic human rights, worked so much we forgot what it meant to be creative and live in our own inspiring divinity, in quiet, in solitude. We have even forgotten what it feels like to be afraid and to grieve, or even worse, some have only ever experienced fear and grief. We have turned a blind eye to our elders, our vulnerable, our sick and suffering and lived in a fast paced, commodified bubble. We had forgotten or never experienced what makes us HUMAN and interconnected. We have lived in ego, and without an understanding of our limitless potential for love, good and peace.*

*We have the opportunity to not only dream about what is possible for us, but create it, together, with a new glimpse of what can be.*

*So no, I don't want "normal" again. Normal can only lead our moral, spiritual and emotional destruction. I want liberation, and creativity, and a collective rebuilding of what we call "humanity".* (Cindi Carnaghi-Collins)

Just think: During our period of isolation, there is actually more connectivity than before; we are looking out for one another and reaching out to one another. For the first time, many of us are experiencing the isolation that many of our frail elders and shut-ins experience. Parishioners have been offering to pick up groceries and medicines. We feel for one another; for the medical professionals on the front line; for those who have lost their pay checks or even their jobs. In the city that never sleeps, many of us are discovering the gift of silence and solitude – a gift that religious communities have cherished since the earliest of days.

There is good news. What we celebrate today, on Easter day, is liberation, creativity, and the collective rebuilding of humanity. It is the Good News of God reconciling the world to himself in Jesus Christ our Lord. It is the Good News of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and the beginning of a new age.

In the Easter Orthodox tradition, there is a beautiful icon of the Resurrection in which Jesus is bursting from the tomb and 'harrowing hell' – the doors of Sheol (the place of the dead) lie broken as Christ tramples on them. Supported by some of the saints, Jesus is pulling two people by their wrists out of their graves. Those two people are Adam and Eve. In traditional iconography, their faces are often painted with many lines because they are old and haggard; it is the real Adam and the real Eve. They are not virtual because Jesus is saving real people. He doesn't take away their reality (they are still old) he transforms it with his presence. That, my friends, is the Good News of Jesus Christ that we celebrate this Easter Day. He has conquered death; he offers us new life in him and in spite of the situation that we currently find ourselves in.

Some words of Rowan Williams:

*"That is why the resurrection is good news for those in the midst of what seems to be incurable, intractable pain or failure, in the middle of a world or an experience where, practically speaking, there seems so little hope. It's not that the risen Christ appears saying, 'By magic I will take away your history and I will smooth out your faces'; but that the risen Christ says, 'In the depth of this reality I will speak, I will be present and I will transform'."* (The sign and the sacrifice, page 103-104)

Alleluia. Christ is Risen!  
The Lord is Risen indeed. Alleluia!