

4.12.20 Er1 Do Not be Afraid...He has been Raised [Mt. 28:1–10]

- We live in coronavirus days
 - Who could imagine that the church would be empty Easter morning and that I would be preaching to empty pews?
 - And yet this is NOT a Father McKenzie moment.
 - Some of you may know the old Beatles song which goes, “Father McKenzie writing the words of a sermon that no one will hear...”
 - Unlike the old Lennon-McCartney song, many people WILL hear, because many will listen even today, not just to me through the internet, but even more importantly so many people will listen to the Easter Gospel this day as it is being proclaimed by the church throughout the world
 - And even more unlike the old Beatles song that a little farther along says, “No one was saved” – unlike that old song, today is about the salvation of God that comes to us as a gift even despite doubt and fear, sin and death
 - But these coronavirus days do impact us in addition to the empty pews
 - I know that this pandemic has impacted me, because this year when I read through the Gospel of Matthew appointed for today, and which is being read in much of the church throughout the whole virus-threatened world – when I read this passage what JUMPED OFF THE PAGE TO ME was that in just ten short verses, TWICE we hear about FEAR, and then TWICE it is said, DO NOT BE AFRAID
 - How can anyone NOT be afraid these days?
 - The parlor game “Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon” is based on the premise that because the actor Kevin Bacon has been in so many movies, and therefore has been around so many people, that if you work hard enough, you can start with yourself, and then through friends and acquaintances, and then through their friends and acquaintances, that you can create a kind-of chain of loose relationships with no more than six links in it that will connect you through people you know and people you don’t know all the way to Keven Bacon

- Or to take Keven Bacon out of the equation, everyone in this world can be connected to any other person through a chain of six people, or six degrees of separation
- So although the world currently has a population of about 6.7 billion people, even people most distant from us can be traced and linked to us like a child connecting the numbered dots on a paper to reveal a picture
- And of course, this very interrelatedness is EXACTLY what is so terrifying as the spread of the virus has demonstrated to us
- But now listen to the Easter Gospel story!
 - Despite earthquake and lightning, the angel said to the women who came to find an empty tomb, **“Do not be afraid”**
 - And to those women, those very first evangelists and witnesses to the gospel... when those women left the empty tomb filled with BOTH fear and JOY in order to tell the other disciples that Jesus Christ had been raised from the dead – he himself, the crucified and risen Christ came to them and once again said, **“Do not be afraid...”**
 - The Easter promise that we need to hear today perhaps more than any other Easter Sunday in our lives, is the promise that whether fear, sin and death wears the face of a virus or whether it wears the face of anything else, fear, sin, and death does not and will not get the last word
 - As Nadia Bolz-Weber, a Lutheran pastor, recovering addict, cranky cynic, and a saintly and also admittedly sinful writer says: “The Christian Faith, while wildly misrepresented in so much of American culture, is really about death and resurrection. It’s about how God continues to reach into the graves we dig for ourselves and pulls us out, giving us new life, in ways both dramatic and small.” [FB]
 - The church pews are empty right now, but despite how long this coronavirus lasts, for over twenty centuries the Good News of Christ’s victory over death has been proclaimed, and it DOES NOT STOP HERE!
 - The promise of God’s gift of Christ’s victory will last far longer than these difficult days – the hope-filled promise

of God's gift of Christ's resurrection that conquers fear and death stretches from now into a future without end, and instead of no one hearing it, all creation will eventually hear and see it!

- And finally, this gift of God does not trickle down, or wind its way through six or more relationships to get to us.
- The gift of forgiveness and life that overcomes sin and death has been given directly to us in Holy Baptism, the gift has been given directly to us in the Words of forgiveness and life, and Christ's gift of forgiveness and life has been given directly to us in the Lord's Supper – and THAT'S why all we can do on Easter, morning even from our homes, is to sing or say AMEN! ALLELUIA!