Greetings,

The Good News of Easter is found in the bible in Corinthians 6:14, “And God has raised the Lord and will also raise us up by His power.” The promise of eternal life is found in the resurrection. This seems to be a good place to start in this pastoral letter written for you as you prepare to celebrate the Easter season.

Easter means something different to everyone. I hope you can experience Easter to be a real, relevant and revitalizing season in the Church year, but more importantly a transformative experience in your life. Easter can be a life changing experience especially for those who are seeking a healthier relationship with Jesus. These are people who are deliberately seeking more joy, meaning and purpose in their faith journey. There are some people who have tried to discover fulfilment, joy, meaning, purpose and love in their jobs, families or other relationships only to discover that although they have indeed experienced all those things, not to the degree of satisfaction that they were hoping for. These are the people who are on a journey of faith and looking for a new experience of Jesus Christ this Easter. Might that include you? I believe that it’s possible to gain new insight and new awareness of God’s transforming love in your life this Easter season.

Unfortunately, there are those who bring a set of human expectations to Easter gatherings, family events and even worship. The challenge with “expectations” is that we now live in a very interesting and delicate time. Covid has introduced new words and behaviours such as social distancing and even a fashion statement that we would have never considered. That is the wearing of masks. Therefore our encounters with each other may feel very different this year. That does not mean that we shouldn’t enjoy the company of others but we might want to consider disregarding old expectations that aren’t beneficial in our encounters with others. Instead we need to open our hearts and minds so that God may surprise us with new experiences of His love.

Families often have a blend of experiences during the Easter season. Many families can’t wait to get together but others are already working on a “strategic plan” of to have a joyful experience. For some families Easter may be about food, family, friendships and faith. I’m not sure it matters in which order these priorities are celebrated. Some of us will receive our guests and others will do all the traveling required to experience encounters with family and friends. Perhaps one “key to success” is to be available for a pleasant surprise with each visit or meal. This year I’m acknowledging that for some of you these family encounters will need to happen over zoom or Facetime because of distance or for the safety of everyone because of covid. Seeing the faces of loved ones and hearing their voices will be the only way for a new experience of family gatherings for some of you this year.

Can we agree that on Easter Monday you may want to look aback over the weekend and say, “I experienced love, hope, joy and peace this Easter.” If that is true for you maybe a plan would be helpful. I encourage you to make every moment count and be ready for a “divine surprise” that all started years ago with the resurrection.

Craig Lounsbrough once said, “Easter is a time when God turned the inevitability of death into the invincibility of life.” This is one of my favourite quotes because it speaks to one of our greatest fears. That being, that when our bodies and minds come to the end of their earthly purpose we might cease to exist forever. Not true! God has granted humanity eternal life. It is a gift that we are encouraged to accept, embrace and live out each and every day.

Clarence Hall once wrote, “Easter says you can put truth in a grave, but it won’t stay there.” Each Holy Saturday service we gather together to declare that truth and to renew our baptismal covenant, declaring that we are followers of a risen Christ. May I invite you to consider attending the Holy Saturday service at 8pm? It is one of my favourite candlelit services filled with inspiring music and a message of new hope.

Acknowledging that some people are struggling this Easter with loneliness, despair, isolation and fear, I want to offer Floyd Tomkins words. He once wrote, “Let the resurrection-joy lift us from loneliness, weakness and despair to strength, beauty and happiness.” I think that the Easter message includes God saying to the world and especially to you, you are loved, you are valued, you are appreciated and I want a growing relationship with you. The resurrection does not ignore pain, suffering, loneliness, isolation or fear. Indeed, as Foulton Sheen once wrote, “Unless there is a Good Friday in your life, there can be no Easter Sunday.” This year we will come together on Good Friday to reflect on the most difficult moments in Jesus’ life that granted Him profound empathy for our lives. He truly understood what it was to experience human suffering and that allows Him to meet us where we are in our life and invite us to keep moving forward even if it means that He carries us for a while.

I appreciate Kate McGahan who once stated, “The very first Easter taught us this: that life never ends and love never dies.” What a wonderful message to be reminded that the essence of who we are continues on much beyond this life and nothing can stop us from loving God or God loving us.

One of my favourite authors and preachers was Phillip Brooks. He once preached, “Let every man and woman count themselves immortal. Let them catch the revelation of Jesus in His resurrection. Let them say both Christ is risen and I too shall rise.” Again Easter speaks to us of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the gift of salvation.

Pope Francis once wrote, “We proclaim the resurrection of Christ when His light illuminates the dark moments of our existence.” Some would say that our world is in a dark place right now. Others would say that there are dark places in the world right now. Still others would say that the darkness in their own life is what preoccupies their thoughts and feelings and blocks them from even considering what is going on in the world. I’m so grateful for the words of Robert Flatt who wrote, “The resurrection gives my life meaning and direction and the opportunity to start over no matter what my circumstances.”

Joseph Wirthlin reminds you and me, “The resurrection is at the core of our beliefs as Christians. Without it our faith is meaningless.” Scripture reminds us that just because we cannot see Jesus in the flesh that does not mean that there isn’t an abundance of evidence that he lived, died and rose again. In John’s gospel we read, “Blessed are those who have not seen and have yet believed. “ (John 20:29) At the essence of what we believe is the scripture, “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

We can all agree that Easter is a very special celebration for families. You and I could probably also agree that every family will celebrate Easter in a different way. Roma Downey offered these words on this matter, “People come together with their families to celebrate Easter. What better way to celebrate than to spend a few hours going on the journey of Christ’s life.” Indeed, I want to invite you to consider attending worship during this Easter season. May the music, scripture and message of the season inspire you to continue along the journey of your faith.

Yours in Christ

The Rev Dr Stephen Hendry

Thursday, April 14 7:00pm Friday, April 15 8:15, 10:00 am Saturday, April 16 8:00 pm

Sunday, April 17 8:15, 10:00 am