*Resurrection Tough*

Easter Sunday, *Year A,* April 12, 2020

The Very Rev. Dr. Michael Sniffen, Dean of the Cathedral

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.

Even at the grave we make our song. Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

I am so glad to be with you. We come together this Easter morning from the sacred spaces in our homes, some of us surrounded by loved ones, some of us alone, compelled to mark, to celebrate, to bear witness to the central claim of the Christian Gospel: that Love is stronger than death.

That life beyond the tomb is changed, not ended.

That death has no dominion over us.

That by the power of God’s love, all that would break us down is already conquered.

Today, the whole human community continues to grieve the loss of so many brothers and sisters to a new virus for which we were woefully unprepared. Our grief is complicated and deepened by the fact that we cannot be together. Our healthy impulse to show up for each other is, in these circumstances, thwarted by the fact that we could do more harm than good. This leaves many of us who are non-essential workers feeling powerless to lighten the load of those who are bearing heavy burdens for humanity right now. So, we do what we know we can do – we stay home to save lives. We give what we can. We pray. We wait.

And today we claim our true hope – amid a persistent awareness of desolation.

Our streets are empty, our churches are empty, our pockets are emptying. We may even feel empty inside. But Christ is our hope – and He is Risen!

My friends, however we are feeling, we are not empty. We are alive. Alive in Christ. It is the tomb that is empty.

When we feel our most hollowed out by the trials and troubles we face, it is God’s will to fill us with Love beyond measure. To pour into our lives such spiritual resources that enable us to weather any storm. God is able to supply our need. And our need is great. This is the life beyond death proclaimed in the Easter story. By encountering emptiness, Jesus disciples discover that their teacher lives. By His wounds, they are healed. By His dying and rising they are born to eternal life.

This holy day, and season, cannot be some histrionic display of unrooted happiness – disconnected from the pains which we endure. No, Easter expresses the depth of joy in knowing that nothing is lost to God. Joy that comes as a surprise beyond death for those who are yet alive. All of us have lost something, someone, or somewhere precious. But God is a God of the lost and in Him we find the love we need to keep on living.

As Mother Morgan said on Maundy Thursday: The love expressed in Christ’s new commandment is not simply something we say or believe. It is something we do and something that is done for us. As Father Adam said on Good Friday: The Resurrection is not about going back to normal, it’s about entering something completely new. This Easter is making that clear in painful, tragic, and transforming ways. There is no going back - no matter the strength us our collective denial. We look around and life may seem the stuff of science fiction right now. But it’s not. This is happening.

The resurrection, too, is happening. It’s not a magic trick. It is the stuff of blood, sweat, tears and hope. It is the rising that follows our dying.

Many of us have been giving more thought to our own deaths these days. Are we prepared? Have we put things in place to ease the burden for our loved ones? Are we doing, right now, what we are called to do with our lives? Are we living well? These questions may bring us up short.

Easter invites a different frame. What does it look like to live as if we have already died? Having been buried with Christ and raised with Him, we too can love as if it costs nothing. Give as if we can store up nothing for ourselves. Hope for a transformed life and world in which all is made new.

Some of us gathered around screens and phones here this morning have lost our jobs. Some have lost loved ones. Some are waking each day and going to the very edge of hell to serve others. Some are balancing work and homeschooling and caring for family members. Some are sick. Some are lonely. Some are recovering. Some will yet die of this virus. All of us will die, in time.

Easter changes none of this. What it does is give us the strength to go through it together as a community knowing that God is with us and that God will never, ever, ever leave us or forsake us. God is like a nurse, holding our hand, in our darkest hour when all other interventions have failed. This is the gesture of God in these troubled days.

God with us. God is holding us. And God goes before us. Wherever our lives are headed, God is already there. The tomb is empty, our hearts are full – and that is Good News that can never be taken away.

We are not defeated. We are not diminished. We are not helpless. We are, instead; forgiven, healed, renewed, empowered by the One who died that we may live. We are people of the resurrection, and that means we are tough! You could say we’re “New York Tough.” Because as we have been reminded in these harrowing days, ‘New York Tough’ is smart, it’s disciplined, it’s unified and New York Tough is loving. All of these things are tough, but the toughest of these is love. Love never ends. God’s love for you. For me. For us. Never ends. It is on both sides of death. Hope springs eternal.

Christ has died. Christ is Risen. Christ will come again.

Even at the grave, we make our song. Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!