

Alleluia, the Lord is Risen!
The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia!

The Lord is risen. Now what?

Easter is not where the Christian story ends—it's where it begins!

I have heard many times over the last couple of weeks that people miss worshipping in our church. I hear you. I do, too. And when I get sad, I start to listen to those old hopeless, helpless, disheartened voices in my head—that worship may be curtailed for awhile—what do I do?

Then-- I remind myself --that Jesus never asked us to worship him. Not once do we hear Jesus say, "Worship me!"

But he did say: "FOLLOW me."

So Easter is when Jesus is expecting us to pick up our own crosses—and follow him.

But first, let me ask you a question. And it's not rhetorical—I really want you to answer it: not to me, but to yourself.

And—actually--- there are 2 questions here:

- What exactly does "following Jesus" mean?
- What is the cross that each one of us carries that might keep us from following him?

But—first things first: what does following Jesus mean? Anyone?

Well, how about his words from the Maundy Thursday service this last week:

"A new command I give you: love one another. By this, people will know that you are following me."

Ahhh—it's the old "loving one another", is it? But what does that *look* like—especially during this pandemic? We can't even get close enough to people to love them, right?

Well—NOT right.

If by loving them we mean hugging them, or touching them, or being in the same room as they are—well then, I guess we can't.

But loving people involves more than warm fuzzy feelings and physical touch.

- Right now—loving everyone means we observe social distancing so as to protect the older people and the immune compromised people. That's love.
- It means we respect the 6' rule.
- It means we pray for those we aren't with.
- It means we're making masks for other people.
- It means we stay in touch.
- It means we serve food to those who have lost their only source of income—even though serving could put us at risk.

It means we don't act in a heartless way, we act in heartfelt ways—it means that Heaven and Earth come together in our hearts.

But what a minute— we all say--that's hard!

Oh—well—Jesus said that Love was a simple rule. But he never said it would be easy. So pick up that cross!

But what ARE the crosses we carry that can prevent us from following Jesus?

Is there a part of us that tries to keep us from seeing certain people as fully created by God and deserving of human dignity?

What else might keep us from following?

Is it our political views? Is it old religious teachings that justify our prejudices? Is it what our family might think of us if we dignify people they don't? Is our cross our fears? Fear of risk? Fear of exposure to ridicule? Fear of people who act or look differently from us?

Why isn't following Jesus as easy as saying Alleluia?

Good question.

There was a woman in Texas in the 80's. When AIDS became the pandemic of that decade, one woman in a church there said she didn't understand homosexuality. But instead of shutting down- she opened her house up to young men dying of AIDS. She took them in when their families threw them out.

Her home became a haven for the dying. 37 young men died in her house while she cared for them. And she began to understand that it's not the things that make us different that matter—it's how we are alike. It's how we care for one another.

Life is precious. Before the pandemic we spent too much time thinking about what we thought was important-- things like wealth and buying things and being entertained. We did. All of us. It's amazing how much we did.

So I'll ask you what I ask myself: what is important now?

How does Jesus want us to act when things are hard? When we could die?

Christ is risen—now what?

"A new commandment I give you: that you love one another." Jesus says.
"By this, everyone will know that you my follower."

Amen.