



Message for Holy  
Saturday 2020 –  
from Bishop Katherine  
Finegan

Dear Friends in Christ,  
  
I thought about offering  
you an Easter address,  
but then, as I considered

where the church is at now, I decided to offer a Holy Saturday message instead.

Because Saturday, the Saturday before Easter Sunday, is the day of the Easter Vigil and are we not, as the church, as a community, as a society, indeed, globally, are we not collectively in a place of waiting, of holding our breath, or maybe just holding on? It seems to me, at this time in history, we are all of us, together, in this space that stretches between Good Friday and Easter, knowing that a new day will dawn, knowing that this time of waiting will end, but the new is not here yet, and it may not be here for some time. And so together, on this Holy Saturday, we wait for new life, we wait for signs of hope, we wait for history to turn and for the time to be right for a day that dawns differently than the day we are in.

Historically, the Easter Vigil Service is one of the most ancient liturgical traditions. It was conceived as a time of remembering the history of salvation, and waiting and watching for the dawn of the Resurrection. First century worshipers gathered in the dark early hours of Easter morning and celebrated the Service of Light, then the Service of Readings that recounts all that God has done and then Holy Baptism for new Christians, all before dawn. Then, as the dark sky lightened to grey and the first rays of morning broke the horizon, worshipers greeted Easter with Holy Communion and gloried in the light of the risen Christ.

While we don't get up in the middle of the night darkness for the Easter Vigil anymore, I do think we feel more than a little in the dark these days. As if we were up in the middle of the night, we are groggy, not with lack of sleep, but with uncertainty, and we feel tired of so many things. We want to gather, to have Easter the way it has been, the way it should be, and we grieve that at this time, this Easter, things will be different, especially worship.

So imagine then, if you will, on this Holy Saturday, that like those ancient believers, we too gather in darkness. But we gather in spirit only to remember, to watch, and to wait. We remember how the Israelites wandered through the wilderness nights with only the pillar of flame that God sent to guide them. We remember God's creating word dispelling the darkness with the command to "Let there be light". And we remember how God speaks the word Christ into our darkness to shine now, today, giving us a light to follow, a light to focus on, a light to guide us through and carry us forward, and the darkness does not overcome it.

But in this time of watching and waiting, I imagine, we feel more like the women who made their way to the tomb, in the dark. They travel in the night of early morning to perform a final act of love and anoint the dead body of Jesus for burial. Their night was one of heart-breaking grief and loss. As they walked through the dark, they were overwhelmed with despair and heavy with sorrow. For those who grieve the loss of loved ones, you know how they felt. You know the weight of it, the feeling of wonder that the world can go on, when for you, time has come to a screeching halt. For so many of us, the rhythms of life are now disrupted, the pace of routine feels scattered, and we fear that life will never be the same again.

Whether you've lost a loved one to this virus or not, or you're afraid of exposing someone who's vulnerable, or whether you're simply biding your time, hoping things will get back to normal soon, the difficult reality is, for all of us, life will never be the same again. And we don't even know how yet.

But one thing we do know, yes, there is at least one thing, as people of faith, that we believe and trust and proclaim, and that is, on Easter, not only did daily life and rhythms change, but the whole cosmos, heaven and earth and under the earth, above the stars, and every created and uncreated dimension shifted, the tomb was empty and the very heart of God was cracked open so that we could enter in, you and me and us together along with the world that God so loves. And not only be welcomed into the heart of God, but know it, trust it, and believe that welcome to be true. Up until that Easter moment, there had been signs of the love of God, yes. The prophets had proclaimed it, the care of God was evident, but in the open tomb, we get a resounding and clear Yes from God. An I Love You that lights up the world and warms you with its embrace. The open tomb is God's neon sign, God's guidance in the darkness, and God's promise that nothing will separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Not even a virus. Not even a pandemic. Not even death or fear of an uncertain future. Yes, the world has been turned upside down. Yes, because of that Easter morning the world will never be the same again. Through the open tomb, we see more clearly, more distinctly, that God has been reaching for you, is reaching for you, and finally has grabbed hold of you through Christ Jesus, who changes everything. Hold onto the one who holds onto you. It will be alright. God's not going to let you go because Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed. Alleluia!

