

The E-Pistle

Special points of interest:

- The church has a history of great cataclysms, of loss and sorrows
- The church also has a history of renewal, rebirth, and rebuilding
- In our time, we have seen the church at its peak, and now we see the church facing a time of loss and darkness again.
- God has not abandoned us!

Inside this issue:

40 Days in the Desert	2
Palm Sunday	2
Maundy Thursday	2
A Time of Persecution	3
A Time of Dispersal and Absence	3
Good Friday	3
A Time of Grief	4
Empty Tomb/ Empty Church	4

The Church in Diaspora

Well, March certainly didn't go as planned, did it? All the things going on in town ... cancelled. All the things going on in church ... postponed. All the things we were going to talk about and work on ... moved to homes, on line, and by phone.

Yes, we are still working on the things! Yes we are still here! Yes, we are still praying for one another, still joining voices in worship, still reaching out, still being the church!

Isolation can be a very difficult time, but it offers us new opportunities, too. Opportunities to walk into the desert with Jesus (it could be 40 days—or more—by the time we're done.)

Opportunities to spend time considering what things must have been like in the early years of the church, when people could be arrested or even killed for their faith.

Opportunities to remember the heady days of the Roman Empire, once the emperors adopted the Christian faith, there were great church councils when bishops from all over the known world gathered to hammer out an understanding of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In those days, many Christians were condemned as heretics, the church divided against itself, and Christian siblings became enemies.



Opportunities to recall that after Rome fell to the wandering warring Frankish and Germanic tribes, the Christian faith was pushed right out of Europe to the farthest reaches, finding refuge in Ireland and Scotland alone as the pagan religions of the conquerors held sway for centuries.

Yet it came back and *we are still here!*

The gifts and frustrations of technology

We've been using ZOOM to hold worship on line—and will continue to do that, but I am looking into ways to expand access for those not inclined to use it. There are risks of trolls getting in, and I am using a 'waiting room' to clear 'entry' into our time together; and will start asking for passcodes too—which will only be e-mailed.

Please keep your eye on our website: <https://cecmadison.org>.

I am working to keep things up to date, with links for worship texts, various other resources, and updates from the Diocese and the Episcopal Church.

Remember, whose and who you are! You are beloved of God always.

40 Days in the Desert with Jesus

You all know the story, at least in outline. After Jesus was baptized by John, he went out into the wilderness to fast and pray, and after 40 days in this isolated silence, the tempter appeared to him, and made him three offers:

Jesus was hungry, famished after his long fast. The tempter said, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” Jesus answered: “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that goes forth from the mouth of God.”



The tempter tried again: “See all the kingdoms of this world: if you will bow down and worship me, all shall be given to you.” Jesus answered, “Worship the Lord your God and serve only God.”

The tempter then took him to the top turret of the great temple in Jerusalem and challenged Jesus to throw himself off, as the angels would surely catch him “so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.” Again Jesus refused, saying, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”

Then the tempter left him, “until an opportune time.”
(*Matthew 4:1-11, adapted*)

If we are to follow his example in our own wilderness, we might ask what it is to always live by the word of God, to worship and serve God alone, and to refrain from expecting God to prove God’s care and love for us. God has already done that, on the cross, and in blessings upon blessings.

Mourning what is lost is where we start, but we are called to focus on the grace that God bestows in these days, not the losses! This is always our task, and always will be our task as his followers.

Palm Sunday

There’s no getting around the fact that things are very different in this holy season this year! I (Evelyn) have spoken with several people about how to honor the days and our traditions. That’s why this newsletter is filled with remembrances of times in the church’s past that have challenged the faithful to adapt and adjust, sometimes in very radical

ways, to the circumstances of their own days.

Meanwhile, we continue with Morning Prayer on Sundays. *This Sunday, I will be blessing the palms*, and we will place them on the garden table for you to pick up—you can display them on your front



doors, or fold them into a cross to display in your home. (We are working on possibly delivering palms to those unable to come.) Those that are not taken will be set aside to use in celebrating our return to the church building.

Maundy Thursday

On Maundy Thursday, we remember the last supper Jesus enjoyed with his disciples. In John’s Gospel, we are told that he washed the feet of the disciples, telling Peter that if he did not allow him to do this for him, he would have no share with him.



Afterwards, he asked, “Do you know what I, your Lord and Master, have done to you? I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done.”

In Matthew’s gospel, Jesus called the bread served at the meal his body, and the wine, his blood.

We won’t be offering these particular symbols and sacrament this year. But that doesn’t mean we can’t recall them and the gift of God’s grace revealed in Christ’s willingness to become the least of all, in order to show the limitless nature of God’s love, and to complete the full way of God’s work among us.

A Time of Persecution

Did you know that in the early years of the church, most worship happened in secret? Did you know that many communities gathered at night, in the safety of darkness? Did you know that Christians were afraid of persecution and yet still met when and as they could?

Think of the disciples, gathered in the upper room after the tomb

was found empty, fearful and grieving: and suddenly the Lord was with them!

They didn't need to self-isolate, as we do, but they certainly were very careful to remain hidden!

Yes, we hear of the wonderful growth of the

church after Pentecost, but we also remember that Stephen was killed, Paul was harassed, arrested, persecuted, and killed, and all

the apostles but one appear to have been martyrs.

Yet many remained true, even unto death.

Let us also remain true whatever the cost!

How long, O Lord, how long?

Will you forget me? Am I

forsaken? How long will you

hide your face?

A Time of Dispersal and Absence

And the days came when the Goths and Visigoths and other tribes conquered much of Europe: cultures were destroyed, cities, towns, and churches were burned, and the fields lay in ruin. Death ruled, as the church shrank into a shadow of its former self. Long years, filled with loss, and a harsher climate: it was widespread cooling that spurred the wandering

tribes to move into new areas, desirous of good land, and riches that beckoned even in the later years of former Roman lands.

"Faith in God, with purity of heart;

simplicity of life with religion;

generosity with love."

Ita, Abbess of Kilkenny, 6th C

European Christianity was pushed out to the margins.

Finally, only Ireland was

still Christian—and it was from Ireland that Christianity began expanding even as life in Europe settled into its new, pagan patterns. Monks ventured forth to the north of Britain, and into Europe, establishing hermitages and monasteries and schools, teaching the Gospel. It was a journey of centuries, and multiple journeys by young visionaries, to establish the faith among the new Europeans. God always finds a way. God will show us the way now, too.

Good Friday

We will post a version of *The Way of the Cross* on our website in PDF form. We invite you to read these together with those in your household, or by Facebook Messenger Chat or Facetime, with your friends and loved ones. The images are from the 14 Stations in our church.

Anthem 1, Good Friday Liturgy

We glory in your cross, O Lord,
and praise and glorify your
holy resurrection;
for by virtue of your cross
joy has come to the whole world.

May God be merciful to us and
bless us,
show us the light of his countenance,
and come to us.

*Let your ways be known upon earth,
your saving health among all nations.*

Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you.

*We glory in your cross, O Lord,
and praise and glorify your
holy resurrection;
for by virtue of your cross
joy has come to the whole world.*



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EPISCOPAL
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*Love God, Love Neighbor,
Welcome All*



And I saw the river
over which every soul
must pass
to reach the kingdom
of heaven
and the name of that river
was suffering;
and I saw a boat
which carries souls
across the river
and the name of that boat
was love.

Saint John of the Cross

A Time of Grief

Grappling with loss? Hoping for “normal”? We don’t know how long this period in our lives will last, but it is likely to last longer than we might like—and fundamental changes may need to be dealt with. Economic recovery may be lengthy and bumpy. Family and friendship ties are being tested in unprecedented ways. Even our little church may find itself facing more challenges than we already were.

We can only do our best—but we must do our best—for our best is all that God wants from us and for us. Lean in, help out, pray, and be ready! Who knows what God will ask?

Empty Tomb/Empty Church

Think of the empty tomb. We may focus on our empty church, but think of the empty tomb.

What happened there?
Why was it empty?

It was empty *because the work God was doing in Jesus was completed there.*

Salvation had been, and has been, completed.

God told Isaiah:

*So is my word that goes forth from my mouth; ...
it will not return to me empty;
but it will accomplish that which I have purposed,
and prosper in that for which
I sent it.*

(Isa. 5:10-11) P

Perhaps we can treat our empty church in the same way:

*as a place to start,
but never to finish,
our life with God.*

