



I cannot pretend to know what this past week has been like for students, faculty, staff, families and all those connected to a school only a mile away from us here. I cannot pretend to know what it's like to navigate shock and horror and disbelief and why and how and what if and so much more than cannot be put into words or any logic at all. I cannot pretend to know what it's like for a phone call or a text message to send the heart racing at a pace that you didn't know was possible. I cannot pretend to know what it's like to be grateful that more life was

not ripped away and still be thoroughly distraught over the one who was, and somehow be expected to return to any sense of normalcy when every timeframe of grief and sadness needs to be respected and honored, all the while the rest of the world insists on moving forward with earthly business as usual.

But I also believe that I cannot fully comprehend the insistent plea from God for the church in times such as these. Because there are thoroughly deafening voices attempting to overpower these tragic days: voices that are only magnified through all the technological means and reaches of which that are completely beyond our control: voices that insist on judgment and shame and blame and establishing guilt and numerous others that do not help with the needed healing at all. And so, the church is called to be forever committed, instead, to grace and compassion and empathy and mercy and love all the while being brutally honest that we may not always have the answers to all the questions. Nevertheless, the church, along with Jesus Christ himself, will not allow the judgment and the shame and the blame and the guilt to have the final say.

And so, we return not just to a cross from Good Friday that we remembered only a few weeks ago: a cross we believe is more than willing to bear our questions with the how's and why's and what if's as well as the understandable anger and frustration and sorrow and all the sighs too deep for words altogether. But we not only return to the cross today, but to the scene of an empty tomb to insist that nothing could happen on this earth to keep the Savior down, including the attempt from keeping the Savior from those often looked down upon by others.

With that in mind, I wonder if this passage that we just heard from John ends up being taken to another holy level, including for times such as these. I wonder that if Easter, which we technically are still celebrating in the church; I wonder if what happened long ago out of a tomb that tried to keep him away from the world, that tried to keep hope and love and grace away from all humanity; that there are still holy repercussions that we cannot take for granted. And so, for this passage, for which I could be completely wrong about this, but I cling to the holy possibility that through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the gate was completely shattered open: a gate that some portions of our church and our history has seemingly coveted more than cherishing the One who shattered the evil and sin and judgment and shame and blame and guilt. Because in that gate, sometimes the church has felt a sense of power and control over who should be the recipients of grace and hope, as if humanity has ever had such power over where God could possibly go.

And so I cling to the holy possibility that through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, that gate was completely shattered open as well, because Christ could not be kept down then, and could not be kept down this past week either. Christ could not be kept down from going after the one who was seemingly lost from any hope and any grace and any most basic compassion. Christ could not be kept down from going after one whose time in the earthly pasture was ended far, far

too soon. And that same Jesus Christ could also not be kept from others wondering through valleys of anger and frustration and asking where God could possibly be in the midst of all of this: for this Risen Lord cherishes the precious children of God who seem to be overcome with doubt in response to all the shock as much as those whose faith can somehow manage to remain firm in their convictions. Through it all, the same cross welcomes all the cries and prayers all over the spiritual map, but the same Resurrection insists that Christ could not be kept down from going out to extend compassion to absolutely everyone in times such as these, and absolutely forever.

We may not have all the answers for the why's and the how's and the what if's about this past week, and for all the pain and anguish that comes and goes about this life, but I do cling to the holy possibility that any gate to separate a precious child of God this past week, or for anyone on this earth; that nothing will ever separate one of the flock or anyone else from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our still-Risen Lord. And so, the church forever remains committed alongside Jesus Christ himself that grace and love and everlasting life will always win out. So, for that greatest News for all of us, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!