



Good morning! And Hallelujah! I am reminded of a poet I came across in the late 60s — Kenneth Patchen. He wrote and illustrated a book of poems titled *Hallelujah Anyway!* Well, that’s how I feel these days: Hallelujah Anyway!

This is a two-parter sermon - the first part is a poem found by parishioner Connie Parent - “Thank you Connie!” The second part refers to a note I/we received from a man in Florida - named John.

But first, I ask you all to look at the picture that came with our program over the internet today. Here it is. This is where we are. We’re looking out from inside Jesus’ tomb. It’s empty. The cloths that wrapped up his body are laid on the rock shelf where he was laid. But the stone is rolled away and he’s moved on. He’s outside chatting with Mary and he’s going to touch base with his disciples and then he’s moving on and ascending - to his God, to *our* God.

The disciples had been there, but they just saw the empty tomb and they went home - not very exciting. Mary had seen two angels sitting in the tomb who asked her why she was crying, but they’ve clearly moved on too.

Everybody was moving on. They’re all getting on with it. Things were happening very fast. There’s a wonderful whirl to what happened on that first Easter morning! And in the next few weeks we’re going to hear about the disciples moving on from aching, numbing sorrow to a strong, invigorated sense of purpose. It’s wonderful what happens to them. But right now, everybody seems to be taking a breath and asking themselves, “What next?” Many of us are asking ourselves that question.

“What next” indeed! Only the wonderful story of the growth of our faith. And it grew and it grew, beginning with disciples like Peter, who announced in his words to Cornelius the Roman Centurion, (who was considered to be one of the first Gentile converts to Christianity by the way), “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.” Wow! And the church just opened up to the whole world. Everybody’s welcome. That is Jesus’ message to us. And it clearly blew Peter’s mind! “Let’s tell everybody!”

So let me read this poem to you. I don't know who wrote it, but with apologies to Theodore Geisel (Dr. Seuss!) and a "thank you" to Connie for finding it.

"Twas late in '19 when the virus began,
Bringing chaos and fear to all people, each land.

People were sick, hospitals full,
Doctors overwhelmed, no one in school.

As winter gave way to the promise of spring,
The virus raged on, touching peasant and king.

People hid in their homes from the enemy unseen.
They YouTubed and Zoomed, social-distanced, and cleaned.

April approached and churches were closed.
"There won't be an Easter," the world supposed.

"There won't be church services, and egg hunts are out.
No reason for new dresses when we can't go about."

Holy Week started, as bleak as the rest.
The world was focused on masks and on tests.

"Easter can't happen this year," they proclaimed.
"Online and at home, it just won't be the same."

Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, the days came and went.
The virus pressed on; it just would not relent.

The world awoke Sunday and nothing had changed.
The virus still menaced. The people - estranged.

"Pooh pooh to the saints," the world was grumbling.
"They're finding out now that no Easter is coming."

"They're just waking up! I know just what they'll do!
Their mouths will hang open a minute or two,
And then all the saints will all cry 'boo-hoo!'

"That noise," said the world, "would be something to hear!"
So it paused and the world put a hand to its ear.

And it did hear a sound coming through all the skies.
It started down low, then it started to rise.

But the sound wasn't depressed.
Why, this sound was triumphant!
It couldn't be so!

But it grew with abundance!

The world stared around, popping its eyes. Then it shook! What it saw was a shocking surprise!

Each saint in each nation, the tall and the small,
Was celebrating Jesus in spite of it all!

It hadn't stopped Easter from coming! It came!
Somehow or other, it came just the same!

And the world with its life quite stuck in quarantine
Stood puzzling and puzzling.
"Just how can it be?"

"It came without bonnets, it came without bunnies,
It came without egg hunts, cantatas, or money."

Then the world thought of something it hadn't before.
"Maybe Easter," it thought, "doesn't come from a store.
Maybe Easter, perhaps, means a little bit more."

And what happened then?
Well...the story's not done.
What will YOU do?
Will you share with that one
or two or more people needing hope in this night?
Will you share of the source of your life in this fight?

The churches are empty - *but so is the tomb,*
And Jesus is Victor over death, doom, and gloom.

So this year at Easter, let this be our prayer,
As the virus still rages all around, everywhere.

May the world see hope when it looks at God's people.
May the world see the Church is not a building or steeple.
May the world find Faith in Jesus' death and resurrection,
May the world find Joy in a time of dejection.
May 2020 be known as the year of survival,
But not only that -
Let it start a revival!"

St. Peter could have written that!
What would happen if we started a revival!?! "Let's start a revival!"

And here's a note I received just this last week. And I have to share it with you. It's from an elderly man who lives in Florida. You can tell his age because his writing is a little wriggly and difficult to read. (It's still better than mine though!)

"Dear Reverend Mother Susan,

I am not a member of your church. No one knows me. But living in Pitman nearly 40 years ago, I was going through a difficult time in my life. It was night and walking past your church, I stopped when finding the doors open. I went in to the sanctuary and prayed. I felt a great peace and leaving, I promised I would repay your church for "just being open."

My brother recently passed. I am using portions of my inheritance to fulfill my many promises to God. I wish it was more.

Bless you and your congregation as I fondly remember your church.

Sincerely,

John"

And he enclosed a check. I'm not going to say for how much, but it is a goodly amount, and at this time, we can certainly use it.

But what's more important is his message to us.

We were here. We were here for him. He was able to find comfort here. It's important for every one of you to know — You are important. You are important to God. And you are important to people you may never meet. You are part of a congregation that loves God and takes God's words to us to heart. You are an important part of God's work in the world.

God tells us to love each other. And we never know how that's going to play out, but if we keep the love coming, it will play out for good. To each and every one of you - you matter. You are a child of God and you matter. You make a difference.

Even when we're not here — even when it's dark and we're all home snug in our beds — Jesus is using us to do his work in the world. Even in the face of Covid 19 - we matter and we can make a difference. All we need to do is follow his two basic commandments: Love God and love our neighbors (which means EVERYBODY) as much as we love ourselves. It's not about "we *can* touch lives." We *DO* touch lives.

HALLALUJAH ANYWAY!

Amen,

Mother Susan+