

**Sermon on Easter Sunday, 2020**  
The Most Reverend Suheil S. Dawani  
St. George's Cathedral, Jerusalem  
John 20:3-18

This is the day that the Lord has made: We will rejoice and be glad in it! For Christ is Risen, He is Risen indeed. Hallelujah!

There's nothing quite like an Easter morning. The air is filled with the sounds of trumpets and with the aroma of Easter lilies. Flowers are everywhere.

Surrounding our service this morning, the world at this time lives in a state of fear, anxiety, and ambiguity as it faces the corona virus pandemic. Many countries are facing so much loss and grief, and infection cases are on the rise.

In spite of this horrible situation that has prevented us from meeting together in this Cathedral this Easter morning, we are thankful for the technology that keeps us connected through social media. In spite of this human crisis, we are trying to capture what was happening on Easter morning. In our faith, everything this morning is *yes*. *Yes* to the love and joy that are woven into our lives. *Yes* to God. *Yes* to the Risen Lord.

Outside this belief, life doesn't look so good or beautiful for many people in this world. Easter this year is surrounded by so many questions, complexities, and uncertainties, especially in light of the suffering, illness, and death of so many people around the globe, resulting in the current lockdown. All around us, we see suffering, pain, and despair.

With all the trumpets of Easter morning, it's easy to forget that the *first* Easter did not begin with a resounding *yes*. The Four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—give different accounts of what happened. But they all capture a sense of darkness, confusion, and uncertainty on Easter morning. And even when it dawns on the disciples that their Lord may be alive again, we don't hear from them at first great cheers of joy—but rather fear and disorientation.

In the version we just heard from John's Gospel, Jesus' close friend, Mary Magdalene, is making her way to the tomb to say goodbye to her teacher. He had been crucified on Friday, and now it was before dawn on Sunday morning. She had come to pay her final farewells to the man who had embodied love, so that he could be remembered with dignity and respect. Maybe she wanted to create a shrine to her Savior, to the man who had healed her and loved her.

But what did she find?

She discovered that the stone covering the opening had been rolled away. So she ran back to tell the others that someone had stolen the Lord's body. The notion of the Resurrection never occurred to her.

Then Peter and John ran to the tomb. They stepped inside and looked, but saw no body. Even so, the Gospel tells us, John the Beloved Disciple saw and believed.

Meanwhile, Mary had come back to the empty tomb. That's when things started shifting quickly. Two men—angels, John calls them—asked Mary why she was weeping. Then another man appeared behind her.

But Mary is crying so hard that she doesn't recognize her own teacher. She thinks he is the gardener. So Mary asks him what he has done to the body.

Then the man says her name: “Mary.” And with that one word, she knows. She recognizes the Risen Lord. “Rabouni!” she cries, “Teacher!” It was a moment of recognition and reunion, filled with awareness and stunned joy.

This, my dear friends in Christ, is our story this morning. Jesus our Savior is not in the tomb! Our Lord has risen and conquered! God has restored him to us in perfection.

I believe, dear friends, that nothing can stand in the way of the power of God’s love. He who was dead is alive!

His message is as new today as it was then. Deep down within us, we must hold onto this wonderful news when all looks dark—when life seems to ebb away, and we are left stumbling over the rocks of humanity’s brokenness and fear of the corona virus. That’s when our Lord is saying to us in the midst of our pain and tears: “Why are you weeping?”

It is a message that we need to hear daily in our lives. It is a message that the whole world must hear today.

We are living in an age of anxiety. But the Risen Lord does not give us more than we can handle—a saying that has biblical roots. God does not give people sickness, nor want his people to be oppressed. Nor does God desire injustice in the world. The God of our faith and life is the God who suffers with us. In the dark nights of our souls, we have found the Risen Lord very near, very present. This was the experience of the women and disciples of Christ on that first Resurrection Day.

In this critical time that the world is facing, my Easter message to you all is to encourage world leaders to work hand-in-hand, joining efforts and resources to overcome this threatening pandemic. It is the time now for the world leaders to leave behind all kinds of suppression, oppression, injustice, cruelty, and domination. This is an urgent call to world leaders to place first all financial and scientific resources to fight this deadly virus. Respecting the dignity of all human beings is a holy duty. Peoples’ freedoms must remain a priority.

It is time to go back to our spiritual values of loving our neighbor, achieving human justice for all, eliminating poverty, respecting all God’s creation, ending wars and violence, and giving the chance for all God’s creation to live in a safe and healthy environment.

The world must never be the same after corona.

Dear friends, the Risen Lord is at work through us. Here in the Diocese of Jerusalem, our hospitals and clinics continue their missions of mercy to the sick in the midst of the pandemic. Our schools and even our rehabilitation centers broadcast their lessons and instructions to their students and clients.

This Easter morning, the Risen Lord is among us. He is feeding us with the bread and wine of his risen life. He will be in our homes this afternoon and tomorrow. He will heal and save us from this deadly disease.

**Our Lord is not dead, He is Risen!  
Christ is Risen indeed. Hallelujah!**