

April 12, 2020
Turning Point
Mark 16:1-8
Rev. Dr. Charles Yoon

Today is the day of resurrection, the day we celebrate every Sunday when we gather to worship and praise God. Today's gospel reading briefly tells about the story. Very early on Sunday morning, at sunrise, three women went to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. The stone had already been rolled back, so they entered the tomb. Then they saw a young man, wearing a white robe. He said, "*You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here!*" (16:6) Jesus was raised to life on this day. Not only was He raised to life, but He appeared to people. He presented Himself to Peter who denied Him; to Thomas who doubted Him; to Mary who wept for Him. He visited with His friends, He supped with His disciples, and He talked with His followers.

We all know about this story. This was and still is an event which shakes our foundation, showing new life beyond death and new hope beyond despair. My question is what does Easter mean for us today. Why does faith in the resurrection make a difference in our life and ministry? Though we know well the Easter story, we never seem fully to grasp its meaning.

In his recent article, "The World after Coronavirus," in *The Financial Times* (March 20), Yuval Noah Harari, who is an Israeli historian and a professor at the Hebrew University, says that humankind is now facing a global crisis, perhaps the biggest crisis of our generation. According to him, the decisions people and governments take in the next few weeks will probably shape the world for years to come and they will shape not just our healthcare systems but also our economy, politics and culture. He says "If this epidemic results in greater disunity and mistrust among humans, it will be the virus's greatest victory. In contrast, if the epidemic results in closer global cooperation, it will be a victory, not only against the coronavirus, but against all future pathogens." In conclusion, he says, "This storm will pass, but the choices we make now could change our lives for years to come." COVID-19, indeed, is and will be the turning point in our history.

Likewise, Easter was the turning point for those who followed Jesus. It is also the turning point for all of us. We are a people who are called to believe in the power and love of God to bring goodness out of evil, life out of death, and hope out of despair. When we believe in the power and love of God, a power and love that can raise the dead to life, our lives will be blessed and we will be a blessing to others.

Let us turn our attention to the disciples after the first Easter morning, after they finally accepted and believed in the resurrection. They came out of the upper room where they had huddled, in other words, self-quarantined in fear. They went to the ends of the earth to spread the gospel, and they founded churches despite persecutions from the Jewish people and the Roman Emperors. They went from being people afraid of dying to being people who offered their very lives to help others come to the faith, hope, and joy that they had. The disciples were changed by their faith after Jesus' resurrection. They were given power to heal and to help others, power to conquer their own fear and despair, and power to defeat the fear and despair that afflicted others. This is what the resurrection is about and what our faith is about.

As we experience the global pandemic which no one has experienced before, we have a challenging life. We might face more challenging times and we might continue to have our worship services at home for a while. This change of life has brought us worries, anxieties, isolation, fear, and loneliness. Many people think that the end of our tough and challenging life is death. But, the resurrection of Christ tells us there is new life beyond death and there is new hope beyond despair.

If we are in Christ and if we have the hope of the resurrection, we will be renewed and changed. Paul said, "*So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!*" (1

Corinthians 5:17) Easter is a pivotal turning point in our lives. With faith in the resurrection we will see new hope, new possibilities, and new life no matter what circumstances. Today is time to change. Today is time to turn our life into Jesus Christ who strengthens us. Today is the time to turn our eyes upon Jesus who brings new hope and life in time of trials and despair.

Henry Nouwen tells a story about his conversation with Rodleigh, the leader of a trapeze group in a circus in Germany. Rodleigh said, "As a flyer, I must have complete trust in my catcher. The public might think that I am the great star of the trapeze, but the real star is Joe, my catcher." During the conversation Henry Nouwen realized that dying is trusting in the catcher. To care for the dying is to say, 'Don't be afraid. Remember that you are the beloved child of God. He will be there when you make your long jump. Don't try to grab Him; He will grab you. Just stretch out your arms and hands and trust, trust, trust.'" (*Our Greatest Gift: A Meditation on Dying and Caring*, by Henri J.M. Nouwen, Harper Collins, 1995.)

Easter is happening all around us in our lives, even when we have to stay at home during the period of the global pandemic and social distancing. God's love is stronger than death. Easter means trusting God, the catcher, and then stepping out from behind our fears to confront our challenges in life hopefully and joyfully. Easter is a turning point in our life and faith. Let us praise God our Father who raises the dead to life. Let us praise Jesus the Son who shares his life with the faithful. And let us praise the Holy Spirit who makes us one with Him.