

It's not an exaggeration to say the Coronavirus has impacted every aspect of our daily lives – physically, emotionally and spiritually. And, it's not an exaggeration to also say the Christian Church's celebration of Easter was interrupted by the Virus. Easter wasn't cancelled, but our Easter was disrupted.

So, what do we do with the Easter Message during coronavirus times? Leaving Easter behind is not an option. We don't want to forget it. It's not a one-day or even a one-week wonder, either. Easter's good news was meant to be recalled and treasured and plugged into every aspect our daily lives – physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Every teacher will tell you the value of students reviewing material, otherwise they'll forget it. Since we'd never want to forget Jesus' victory over sin, death and the grave for us, let's ask again: **“What Do We Do with the Easter Message During Coronavirus Times?”** God gives us 2 short and sweet answers: **BELIEVE IT!** and then **REPORT IT!**

Have you ever lost your bearings, unsure of where you were? Maybe something like this has happened to you. One summer day, during our college years, Sandy and I went to Great America for the rides and rollercoasters. I was so excited to get into the park and hit the rides, that when I parked in that huge parking lot, I didn't pay attention to any letters or numbers on the light posts to identify where I parked.

We had a great day together. I even won a giant red stuffed bear for her by shooting basketballs at an arcade. Just before closing time, a thunderstorm unexpectedly blew in and lightning knocked out the power to the whole park. Within moments, emergency lights kicked on to help the park goers find our way to the exit in the downpour.

Picture ... a rain-soaked couple in white T-shirts and a water-logged giant red stuffed bear – not a pretty sight, unless you like shades of pink. As we began to walk into the parking lot, I quickly realized I had lost my bearings - unsure of where I parked the car. Soaking wet and cold, we waited until most of the cars cleared out so we could find ours. My car ... it

was parked at least 20 rows farther back from where I had been looking. Not my finest hour.

Looking back, losing your bearings at Great America – not that big of deal. Losing your bearings ... spiritual – that's a big deal. It can cost us an eternity. It can happen to any of us. Our lives are so crowded with things to do, things to put up with, decisions to make, that if we haven't yet, we may want to step outside and scream: *“I want this to be over and done with.”*

How do we keep our bearings? By returning to the Easter tomb again and again. That's what the early Christian church did. Why do you think they changed the day for worship from Saturday, the OT Sabbath, to Sunday? Every time they gathered they would remember it was on Sunday, the first day of the week, that Jesus their Savior rose from the dead. Martin Luther called every Sunday a mini-Easter.

Today's lesson from Mark's Gospel reports on the events of Easter, along with 3 short and sweet personal visits from Jesus. Short and sweet is Mark's style. His Gospel, only 16 chapters, is by far the shortest of the 4 Gospels.

Jesus' first personal visit. **Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene.** Mary needed this. Jesus meant the world to her. Without him, she'd still have been demon possessed and her trust would have been misplaced. There was a brief time when Mary thought he was gardener and asked for the location of his missing corpse. Once Jesus called her name, she realized his body wasn't missing. He was standing right next to her.

While Mary immediately shared this jaw-dropping news with Jesus' disciples, they determined this good news – even though witnessed by multiple sources and promised by Jesus – couldn't be true!

Jesus' second personal visit. **Afterward Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking in the country.** Late Easter afternoon two disciples were making the 7-mile hike from Jerusalem to Emmaus, when Jesus appeared to them out of nowhere. At first, he kept them from recognizing him during this OT Bible Story time as he explained how the resurrection had been prophesied.

But just before disappearing, he opened their eyes so they could recognize him, and he opened their hearts so they could believe him. Guess what they did with the news? Same as Mary. They sprinted back to Jerusalem and shared it. Again, the disciples gathered there didn't believe it. There's a pattern here, and a growing problem. The disciples had the testimony of Mary Magdalene, some other women and the Emmaus' disciples – yet, they refused to believe it.

Jesus' third personal visit. **Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating.** Tired of his disciples' repeated pattern of unbelief, he let them have it: **He rebuked them for their lack of faith.** They deserved it. How could Jesus expect others to believe his disciples, when they didn't believe it themselves?

Finally, after refusing to trust the Scriptures and the eyewitness accounts of their friends, they did believe. But only after Jesus spoke with them, ate with them and had them touch his wounds.

Now that his followers are on board, he commissions them. At the end of each of the 4 Gospels and at the beginning of the Book of Acts, Jesus says words similar to his words in our lesson: **Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.** Here's why this is so critical: **Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.**

No longer would circumcision be the entrance into God's family, like in OT times. Instead, through the Sacrament of Baptism, Jesus would bring the mercy and forgiveness of the gospel. Only Christ saves. Only those who rely on him are saved. Faith comes through Baptism. Faith, Baptism and salvation are linked together: **Whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved.**

Jesus does add this warning label: **Whoever does not believe will be condemned.** For those who don't believe or refuse to believe, there is no salvation. Unbelief chops off a person's connection with Christ.

What's the point of Jesus' personal visits? What do we do with the Easter message during Coronavirus times? It's simple - **BELIEVE IT!**

Trust Jesus! Get to know him so well that, if somebody woke you up in the middle of the night and asked you what you believe, you would say: *"Jesus Christ rose from the dead! He buried my sins in his tomb. Someday he'll raise me from my grave. Good night!"*

Rely on Jesus! Get to know him so well that, if the devil whispers that it's all a pack of lies, you can say: *"Satan, you're crazy! Christ rose from the dead - and he did it for me. It's the greatest event in history!"*

Depend on Jesus! Even if someone would threaten: "Deny Jesus or die!" – you can say: *"Jesus is alive! I need him, and you need him too. He's more valuable than life itself."*

What do we do with the Easter message during Coronavirus times? God's short and sweet answers are: **BELIEVE IT** and then **REPORT IT** - like Mary, the Emmaus' disciples, and ultimately all the disciples did!

Work isn't going well. The walls are closing in. Patience is running thin. Someone's under the weather. Someone else is feeling useless or underappreciated. The Easter message is the best news you can **REPORT** to them! Jesus has useful work for us in heaven. He's got a perfectly healthy body and brain on hold for us in heaven. Plus, his resurrection power and love will help us cope with anything here.

Let's say a spouse, child, friend or fellow member wanders into sin. The Easter message is the best news you can **REPORT** to them! Jesus wants them to repent and receive the forgiveness he earned with his death-defying victory over sin.

Easter changes everything for you! **BELIEVE IT** ... and plug it into every aspect your daily lives – physically, emotionally and spiritually.

On your worst day, you can say: *"Thanks God! It's not going to be this way forever. Someday I'll join you."*

On your best day, you can say: *"Thanks God! You're so good to me! But I haven't seen anything yet. Someday I'll join you."*

Now **REPORT IT**, so it can change everything for someone else, too.