

Dear Friends in Christ:

Years ago a friend of mine in ministry telephoned me with the news that the church he was serving was ready to celebrate the completion of their meeting house mortgage. He invited me to attend and to offer a prayer, and I was happy to accept.

The day of celebration arrived, and the time came for the church leaders to go outside and light up the legal documents that had kept this church in the bondage of debt for years. As the flames consumed the papers, I saw the joy and relief of a grateful people. But I was a little detached and unable to experience the heights of jubilation that the members of this congregation felt. I was present at the victory but I had not shared in the people's daring vision, their leap of faith to move in God's direction, their sacrificial giving, and their patient hopefulness to make this great event happen. I was an outsider looking in.

The resurrection event of Jesus Christ presents a similar issue. The true joy of the first Easter had power only for those who had a part in the hardship and the suffering of Christ that preceded it. What can the dawn mean to one who has not endured the night? What can

good health mean to someone who has never been ill? What can restoration mean to those who have never felt separation? What is the glory of Easter without the preparation of the Lenten season and the penitence of Good Friday? If we miss the spiritual lessons of this time to make our faith journeys to the cross, then Easter becomes just another day for brunches and finery, bunnies and jellybeans.

We mark our lives in terms of celebrations. But we can forget the memories of trial and difficulty. We may want to move smoothly from the poinsettias of Christmas to the palms of Palm Sunday to the lilies of Easter and by-pass the thorns of Good Friday. But it is in those times of trial when we find out who we really are. We discover our own identities, strengthen our faith, locate our courage, and realize the purpose that God has given to our lives. Jesus showed that to gain the ever-lasting crown he had to first endure the wooden cross. For us to follow Jesus all the way, we need to identify with Jesus in his sacrifice and death so that we may participate in his resurrection. That is what the apostle Paul meant when he wrote: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me." (Galatians 2:19b-20) To feel the freedom of new life in Christ, we ask God to help us let go of the old life that has entombed us.

Easter proclaims that in the resurrection of Jesus Christ God also raised up life from death, healing from suffering, and reconciliation from brokenness. This has been a very difficult winter for many people in our church, our community, nation, and world. I hope all of us can share in giving comfort, strength and support to one another and to others. We do that through our heartfelt prayers, thoughtful words, and loving actions. We do that by upholding our covenant and coming together to worship God on Sunday morning. We do that in showing our faithfulness to God by caring for those who are hurt and in grief, who are hungry and in need.

To be part of the Easter celebration we first experience the challenges of the Lenten Season, the trials of Holy Week, and the hardship of Good Friday. When we do, our faith in God becomes stronger and the victory that Christ won for us becomes much more meaningful.



Yours in Christ,  
Pastor Chris Horvath