

EASTER GREETINGS

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ in Virginia,

Greetings in the name of our Risen Lord. He has indeed risen.

“Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:55 NIV)

Christ has conquered death and we shall live forever. So with the hosts of heaven let us all praise and glorify him.

Warm Easter greetings to you Bishop Humphrey, Pastor Kelly, all pastors and to you all members of ELCA Virginia Synod. Happy celebrations in your worship services as we begin our Easter journey.

In the early hours of Easter Sunday I was woken from my sleep by the sound of a guitar being played and a song being sung. Someone was singing in pidgin “Jisas i kirap long Matmat” (Jesus has risen from the grave} from our hymn book “*Amamas Wantaim Na Lotu Long God*”. On Saturday night my wife and I had planned to wake up at 4.30 am to sing as we always did every year on Easter Sundays. We always woke people up by our singing but this morning it was different, some else woke us up by his singing at 4.00 am. He had a story to tell that Jesus had risen. Over the years that has become our way of celebrating the Easter at Good Shepherd Parish in Bialla - rising early and singing or having sunrise service.

We thank God for a wonderful partnership that we have and that we can celebrate Easter together. In celebrating Easter we proclaim to the world that Jesus Christ our Lord has risen. God has made possible our partnership through His Son. It is because of his death and resurrection that people of different nations, tribes, cultures and languages have become one people. It is only through him that we will continue to strengthen our partnership.

In the resurrection story we hear that the tomb was empty and the disciples saw it. Jesus also appeared to them removing any doubts that they had as we read in John 20:19-31. Even doubting Thomas believed because he was able to see the scars. Jesus’ words to Thomas in verse 29 are for those of us who have not seen him with our physical eyes, “*Because you have seen me, you have believed, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*” (NIV)

So many things can be said about Thomas not being with others on the first appearance of Jesus and of his doubt. But we should be grateful that he was not there because we are all like him. We want evidence of what we hear. Where is the proof then? It is in the word. It has been written by those who have physically seen him and have spent time with him after the resurrection. John continues in his writing in verse 30 where he says, “*Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not recorded in this book.*”

But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

Do we need any more evidence than what has already been written? No, we have enough to prove that Jesus had risen. The disciples all suffered and died proclaiming it because they were witnesses to it and knew it was true. We believe in what has been written and are blessed. Jesus himself is with us now as he said he would in Matthew 28:20 and is helping us to believe and to proclaim the message of his death and resurrection. This is all we need to strengthen our faith and also to tell others of our faith.

I asked my congregation members one Easter, "Do you believe Jesus has risen?" and they all said yes. I told them to turn to the person sitting next them and to tell them that 'Jesus had risen'. When they had done so, I told them that they had just spoken a very powerful three word message and I added, "Go and tell others too".

We have a mission now to tell the world of the story of Easter my brothers and sisters in Christ. People need to be assured that we have hope in Christ because he had risen. There are thousands of people suffering and dying from the spread of Covid-19 especially at this time. We can give them the blessed hope that Jesus has conquered sin, death and Satan and that we are conquerors in Christ. He is our only hope and we must put our complete faith and trust in him. Our faith must not be in science, medicine and in worldly wealth and knowledge, but in Jesus Christ through whom God answers our prayers and helps us through these sources. In our partnership we can reach out together to those who are in need with our prayers and the sharing of the Gospel. We must also help them to feel the warmth of God's love in every way we can.

I thank you for your Easter video greetings and I thank you also for your prayers for us in Papua New Guinea. We will also continue to remember you all in our prayers. May God bless and help you all in all you do as you continue to proclaim the Gospel of our Risen Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

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