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God and the Pandemic: Four Gifts
Four: The Gift of Love
An Easter Message from Bishop McConnell
April 12, 2020



As we journey through Holy Week, which this year is unlike any other in our lifetime, you are invited to spend a few minutes reflecting with Bishop McConnell through a series of short videos.

With one theme each day for Maundy Thursday through Easter, the bishop explores the gifts we can find in these strange and unsettling times.

April 12, 2020
Easter Sunday

Beloved in Christ,

This Easter will be unlike any we have known. We'll miss the glorious music filling our churches. We'll miss the loud acclamation of "Alleluia! Christ is Risen!" And the shared response, "He is risen indeed. Alleluia!" It may seem hard for us to proclaim the empty tomb of Christ when so many graves are being filled all around us.

And yet we know that there is a power that has, this day, set a limit for death, a power that can turn our sorrow into joy, even in the middle of broken lives and fading dreams. If you are in doubt, just listen to the witness of Mary Magdalene.



When she comes to the tomb of Jesus, very early on Sunday morning, while it is still quite dark, at first she is not sure what she sees. Perhaps it is her tears, maybe the half-light, but soon she is aware the stone at the tomb has been rolled back. She stoops down to look inside and discovers that the body of Jesus is gone. And Mary's world, which she was holding together out of devotion to her Lord, now completely falls apart. She runs to Peter and John with the news, *They have taken the Lord away, and I do not know where they have laid him (John 20:13)*. They come with her to the tomb, they look, they leave, and she sits alone; not even two angels in the grave, not even the risen Jesus himself whom she mistakes for the gardener, can shake her out of her despondency, until the Lord speaks her name. "Maryam," he says. And everything is changed.

It is nearly impossible for us to imagine how something so great could happen so suddenly, as if the pandemic around us, all the fear, the infection, the death, were gone in the twinkling of an eye, like a bad dream, and were replaced with a new creation, not like the old one we knew before; this world would be alive beyond death, outside of death. It would be as though some power of God had grabbed hold of this sad and tired world and pulled us at once out of despondency through the gates of heaven into the life of the Resurrection. If there were such a power then surely there would only be one name for it, one word: and that word would be love. The love of God.

I don't mean human love. Human love is great, but human love has very little power over sin, and no power over death. But the love of God who sent his only Son into the world, *not to condemn the world but that the world through Him might be saved (John 3:16-17)*, this love has power to change everything, to undo death in a heartbeat, and make the creation new. Today that has happened in the body and spirit of the Lord Jesus, the love that points to the day when all that is mortal will be swallowed up by life.

I don't know if Mary, as she kneels on the threshold of that new world, knows that from now on she will be living in two worlds at once: by faith, in the world of the Resurrection, and as we do in the world of sin and death, the world of this pandemic. I do know that she knows that everything has been changed, that death no longer has the last word, not now, not ever. She runs to tell the other disciples. It is a long morning for her. They are all holed up in their houses, under lockdown out of fear. She visits them one by one, knocking on their doors. And when they reluctantly let her in, she tells them the news briefly, perhaps in a whisper: *I have seen the Lord (John 20:18)*, she says, and not much else; then she goes on to the next. There are no flowers, no music, no crowds. No trumpets go before her, and if you were awake at that hour and saw her furtively running from house to house, you might think nothing has changed, though everything has changed, death having been overturned by the gift of the love of God through the Resurrection of God's Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

And we, too, live on the threshold of this new world, even while we live in the world beset by a pandemic. This Easter, like Mary, we will speak the news quietly, and for the next fifty days, and well beyond, we will live in two worlds, as we always have. The virus will follow its course, while the life of the Resurrection unfolds. But we know, in the end, there will be only one world, when the dead shall be raised and the risen Christ will be all in all.

In the meantime, let us imitate Mary. Please don't go knocking on doors. Use a phone instead. Call someone — anyone — and say to them what Mary said. Say, "I have seen the Lord!" You might even want to add, "Alleluia. Christ is risen!" And wait for the response: "The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!" Then go about your life. Pray for the dying, remember the dead. Give thanks for the caregivers. Check in with the lonely. Feed those who long for God with the comfort and assurance of your faith. In every way you can think of, share your joy in the gift that the love of God has given: for Christ is risen, the first-born of many from the dead. And nothing can take that away.

Faithfully your bishop,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dorsey", with a stylized flourish at the end.

(The Right Reverend) Dorsey W.M. McConnell, D.D.
VIII Bishop of Pittsburgh

To view all of the videos in the series, please visit
<https://www.episcopalpgh.org/god-and-the-pandemic-four-gifts/>

