

¹⁹When it was evening on that day,
the first day of the week,
and the doors of the house where the disciples had met
were locked for fear of the Jews,
Jesus came and stood among them and said,
“Peace be with you.”

²⁰After he said this,
he showed them his hands and his side.
Then the disciples rejoiced
when they saw the Lord.

²¹Jesus said to them again,
“Peace be with you.
As the Father has sent me,
so, I send you.”

²²When he had said this,
he breathed on them and said to them,
“Receive the Holy Spirit.

²³If you forgive the sins of any,
they are forgiven;
if you retain the sins of any,
they are retained.”

²⁴But Thomas (who was called the Twin),
one of the twelve,
was not with them when Jesus came.

²⁵So the other disciples told him,
“We have seen the Lord.”
But he said to them,
“Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands,
and put my finger
in the mark of the nails
and my hand in his side,
I will not believe.”

²⁶A week later his disciples
were again in the house,
and Thomas was with them.
Although the doors were shut,
Jesus came and stood among them and said,
“Peace be with you.”

²⁷Then he said to Thomas,
“Put your finger here
and see my hands.
Reach out your hand
and put it in my side.
Do not doubt but believe.”

²⁸Thomas answered him,
“My Lord and my God!”

²⁹Jesus said to him,
“Have you believed because you have seen me?
Blessed are those
who have not seen
and yet have come to believe.”

³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples,
which are not written in this book.

³¹But these are written
so that you may come to believe
that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God,
and that through believing
you may have life in his name.

What is Normal Anyway?

I miss my normal.

Don't you?

I miss just popping
into the grocery store.

I miss picking up my kids from school
—their excitement when the day is done.

I miss the buzz of this Fellowship Hall

on a Wednesday night because
it is full of people;
full of all of you.
I miss the rhythm of Monday-Friday
so that weekends felt restful.
I miss my regular workout group
and bumping into you all at El Paso Publix.

This is what happens
when your world
is turned upside down isn't?
You find yourself lamenting
the big things and little things.
Plenty of things turn our worlds
upside down.
Death, job transitions, graduations;
empty nests and suddenly full ones.
More than ever,
as we live in a world turned upside down,
this first sentence in our gospel text
speaks to our right here, right now;
They were locked inside because of fear...ugh.

More than ever we understand what those disciples felt;
we understand when normalcy is shattered;
when we are scared of crowds of people;
when we are anxious about leaving our homes.
We know what it is
to wake up and feel uncertain.
We know what it is
to go about our day
trying to ignore what feels like
low-level fear and anxiety
with a side of panic.
We know what it is
to wonder if normal
will ever return.

At Easter lunch last week,

Claude shared this passage from Hebrews,
“²³Let us hold fast
to the confession of our hope
without wavering,
for he who has promised
is faithful.

²⁴And let us consider how to provoke one another
to love and good deeds,
²⁵not neglecting to meet together,
as is the habit of some,
but encouraging one another,
and all the more as you see
the Day approaching.”

Right now, that is everything.

Holding fast to hope without wavering;
to meet together, right?

To see *that day* approaching...to be able to gather;
to give each other hugs
and have one of Matt’s salads with grilled chicken
and raspberry dressing.

And maybe we are dreaming of the Easter we missed

—so that when we do get back together
we’ll have brass and lilies,

Donut Life and good coffee!

We can’t wait to go back to normal!

But what if our confession of hope should be
that normal is gone?

Lutheran pastor David Lose wonders,

“Do I really think

that after we’re beyond this stretch

things will go back to the same old, same old?”¹

Normal, whatever that was,
didn’t return after Jesus died

¹ David J Lose, <https://www.davidlose.net/2020/04/easter-2-a-2020-the-new-normal/>

or after his resurrection appearances.
Which makes me think that
perhaps Easter's message
is that we cannot jump back
to the same old life
or the same old faith.

Eastertide is a season of celebrating,
as the gospel of John says,
signs of the resurrection.
And if there is one thing that isn't normal,
it is coming back to life after death.
There were so many signs of the resurrection,
they weren't all written down,
only some of them were
so that we might believe.

The resurrection appearances we celebrate in fact,
mock a return to normal.

You want to bring spices to the tomb
like you normally would for someone you love, Mary?
Guess who will show up
looking like the gardener!

You want to go back to fishing,
living your normal life,
Peter, James and John?
Guess who will show up on the beach
cooking your breakfast!

Think all the hoopla in Jerusalem is done
and it is best to just head on back home to Emmaus?
Guess who will show up
to walk with you on the road.

Do you think locking your doors
and meeting together quietly
will bring normal back?

Currently we have a whole lot more in common
with our apostolic mothers and fathers
than we ever have had before.
Going back to normal isn't possible
or even faithful.

The Easter declaration *was*
our eyes have been opened
and we have seen the Lord.

Now the declaration *is*,
our eyes have been opened
and we have seen that our *normal*
was a thinly veiled curtain
hiding too many sins and omissions.

This virus is as blind to our divisions
as the weather.

It hasn't cared if you were a Chinese peasant farmer
or the prime minister of England.

The reality of what was normal
has been damaged,

and again, pastor David Lose rightly affirms,
sheltering in place has been easier for some but not all.

"[Workers] making minimum wage,
including grocery workers

and warehouse and delivery service employees,
typically had to keep at their jobs

whether they had sufficient protective gear or not.

[T]he fragility of a shrinking middle class,
limited financial savings,

and healthcare beyond the reach of too many

has been devastating to major sections of the population.

Will we, can we, do we

want to go back to this normal?"²

² *ibid*

To speak plainly,
for Easter Christians,
normal doesn't exist anymore.

When Jesus died no one expected him to rise.
They just didn't.

Dead people don't come back to life
no matter how many times
Jesus drops the hint.

The life these men and women
had built around the Lord and his ministry
died on a cross
in an ending no one saw coming.
They woke up for several days
in a state of uncertainty, fear and grief.

Normal was gone.

But when Jesus appears to those frightened disciples,
his first word
is a word of peace.
Shalom.

Wholeness in the midst of their shattered normalcy
wholeness in the midst of their breaking.

Friends, hear Jesus speak that to us:

peace, shalom,
and wholeness
in the midst of our breaking.

That peace was a blessing of God's favor,
a manifestation of divine grace³

so that as normal fell away,
Christ's peace came as a blessing
for the new that was ushered in.

In one breath the disciples are given a new normal;
"as the Father sent me, so I send you."

³ <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/shalom/>

Earlier in John's gospel Jesus promised
that an advocate and helper would come:
the Holy Spirit Jesus breathes on them
gives them new life,
a new normal
—just as God gave newness
to the beginning of all things.
Those anxious, fearful and panicked disciples
receive a new normal
enfolded in Jesus' blessing and sending.
"The unequivocal purpose
of this Spirit-breathed mission
is to offer the new and renewed life
that the risen one promises."⁴

Among other things, this time has shown me
that I am not in charge of much of anything
other than myself
a couple of humans and dogs.

But here's something we can all be in charge of.
We can hold onto this confession of hope
that what was normal would cease;
we can hold onto the promise,
that this Eastertide is the very reality of a new normal.
Now that Risen One
has given us peace and wholeness
we have the strength
to weather whatever is breaking us in **the now**.

This moment of now, might hold death.
It might hold sickness.
It might be devastation to our financial stability.
But our gospel,

⁴ D. Cameron Murchison, Feasting on the Word

our good news tells us
that Jesus isn't about to leave any of us there.
And we must hold fast
to that confession of hope:
that Christ is faithful.

Easter's bold claim on our lives
and on all of creation
is that in Jesus shows up in our breaking
and brings us wholeness.

A blessing that we as Easter people
are eager to offer to each other
and the world as each new day approaches.

Have you seen John Krasinski's, Some Good News?
He's been reporting stories and videos
of good things, good news
while we've all been quarantining.

He offers the goodness of the world
at a time when it seems that
all we hear is the bad.
Even as the number of deaths climb,
hospitals around the country
are celebrating when patients
who have tested positive for Covid-19
have come off ventilators.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eg08rJGKjtA> (1:50-3:53)

Because here's what it is wonderful
when our normal is shattered:
we see the beauty
of this world Christ redeemed:

even when there is bad news,
even the worst news,
there is always good news,
there is always gospel.

Our eyes have been opened to the good news

—that is our new normal.

Grieving the bad and celebrating the good
—not ignoring the bad
not offering cheap platitudes for the bad,
but honestly grieving what is lost:
that is where Jesus shows up.

Celebrating the good,
finding it when things are hardest,
finding hope
even if it is that weed on your sidewalk
that refuses to be squashed;
celebrating the good news
is where Jesus shows up.

Our new normal is embracing this broken life,
with a blessing of promised wholeness.

We face life with authenticity and integrity.

We face life with limps, bandages, and scars.

Our faith is one that believes
because of the Easter declaration;
we have seen the Lord.
And so, **we together** are empowered
to embrace everything,
the bad and the good,
death and new life,
we embrace it all in the arms
of one who has holes in his hands.

For Easter Christians,
normal died 2000 years ago.
“As the Father has sent me,
so, I send you.”

Right here, right now...

tell how wholeness has come to you,
even in the breaking.

Even when your doors were locked.

Even when you were scared of the crowds

Even when you doubted.

Tell some good news.

This is our new normal.