

> Dearly Beloved,

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> "How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" (Psalm 137:4) This question is asked by the Hebrew people who are in exile in Babylon. They are displaced and cut off from all that was familiar to them in Jerusalem. It seemed fruitless to be singing the Lord's song. What was there to sing about in their situation and who would be listening to them when it seemed as if God had abandoned them? So, they put down their musical instruments and succumbed to despair and silence, for awhile.

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> However there is another story of a different response to loss and suffering. It is the story in the Acts of the Apostles of Paul and Silas. They are arrested, severely beaten, thrown into the deepest darkest part of a prison and locked in chains. Obviously in pain and cut off from friends and family and their Christian community it was an opportunity for despair. To the amazement and shock of their fellow prisoners they started praying and singing praise songs to God. They were not in denial, or crazy. They were engaged in what I call Holy Defiant Rejoicing in response to God's Holy Defiant loving of them, as us, in the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the darkness and pain of their suffering they refused to believe that God was absent, that God didn't care, but rather that God was ever present with them, suffering with them, and would love them through their darkness to a new life. That was the basis of their Hope, a Hope that Paul would later write, " that never disappoints ".

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> Remembering this is helpful to me and I pray will be helpful to you. Even as we go through and back and forth the various stages of grief and not knowing how long we will be in this strange land, we can choose, and I believe we must choose as best we can, to keep praying and singing the Lord's song. The song of praise and hope and gratefulness for what we do have and for the Grace Moments he gives us every day we are in this strange land and that we have each other.

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> We can sing the Lord's song by greeting each day with a "Thank you" to God. By asking God to open our eyes to see his hand at work in our life and in the world around us. By speaking honestly to God of how we feel in our grieving, whether it's anger, or why?, or doubts, or resignation, or acceptance, or fear and anxiety. We can sing the Lord's song in this strange land by praying for others, by calling people we know and checking in with them with listening and responding words of encouragement if needed.

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> And we can sing the Lord's song in this strange land by Celebrating Easter: The Day of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is our hope and strength, our light in the darkness that nothing, not even death, can put out!

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> Suggestions for Celebrating this Easter with Holy Defiant Rejoicing;

> 1. Do something to Celebrate the Day. Don't allow the Grinch of COVID19 steal Easter from you

> 2. Watch live stream of our Diocesan Service, or some other Service

> 3. Dress in the morning as you would dress to come to Church for the Service, if you could

> 4. If possible, pick/get flowers and place them around a cross at home

> 5. Watch our Holy Trinity Easter video Sunday morning on Our Holy Trinity website, youtube, or Facebook

> 6. Do something special for your Easter meal, what you eat, where you eat it even, and especially, if you live alone.

> 7. Read the Resurrection story in Matthew 28:1-10, or Luke 24:1-12, or John 20:1-18 and pay attention to anything in the story that speaks to you. Read together if you live with others. If you live alone read it with someone by phone, etc, if you can

> 8. Think about moments when you have felt God's presence in loving and encouraging ways and thank him

> 9. Call someone, tell someone, "Alleluia, Christ is Risen!". You may feel strange doing this and they may also think you are strange, or weird. But living in a strange land sometimes calls for doing strange things in order to keep our sanity and to not succumb to the darkness and loss we are presently living

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> I've changed my mind and decided to dig up the "A" word for Sunday (that is, if no one has moved it) and pictures will be taken and sent to you. I will save the paper Banner for when we are physically together again. Blessed be the tie that binds our hearts in mutual love. Alleluia, Christ is Risen! The Lord is Risen Indeed, Alleluia!

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> In the Love of our Risen and living Lord, Fr. Bob