



The Episcopal Church in Jerusalem & The Middle East
The Diocese of Jerusalem

The Most Revd. Suheil Salman Dawani

Easter Message—2020

The Most Reverend Suheil S. Dawani
Anglican Archbishop in Jerusalem

“Jesus said to [Mary], ‘Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?’”
(John 20:15a)

In the above passage, the Gospel of John poignantly recounts to us Mary Magdalene’s first encounter with the Risen Lord.

It is a scene fraught with conflicting emotions. The first of these emotions is deep sorrow: Mary weeps at the empty tomb not only because her Lord and Master had recently suffered a horrible and painful death, but also because someone had apparently stolen his body—or at least taken it away from the tomb for some unknown reason. Since such an act was disrespectful, Mary’s sorrow might also have been tinged with righteous indignation and even bitterness.

And so when the voice from behind her asks why she was weeping, her reply was a plaintive one: “They have taken away my Lord,” she cries, “and I do not know where they have laid him.”

But then the voice again speaks to her in a soft and reassuring tone: “Mary,” it says. Recognizing the call of her name, Mary turns to behold the Risen Christ. “My Master!” she exclaims, falling at his feet with a sudden rush of unsurpassed joy. Jesus was not dead, but alive! “He is risen! He is risen, indeed!” Mary said in her heart.

This year, as we journey through Holy Week towards Easter morning, our own feelings resonate with Mary Magdalene’s perhaps more than at any other time in our lives. Indeed, our entire world seems turned upside-down. Hardship, illness, and death surround us because of the coronavirus pandemic, with thousands around the globe struggling for their lives, even as brave healthcare workers labor to save them. Beyond this, safety restrictions have left most of us sadly locked inside our houses, unable to meet in person with friends or extended family, and unable to worship together in our churches as we do each year during this sacred time.

Yet in the midst of this sorrow and dejection, our Easter message remains one of hope and joy. Just as Jesus rose from the grave, breaking the bonds of sin and death, so also has he promised to be with us to the ends of the earth, raising us up from whatever hardship bears down upon us. Empowered by his Spirit, the Body of Christ throughout the world has reached out his hands of love to both those afflicted by the virus and those suffering in its economic aftermath.

Here in the Diocese of Jerusalem, our hospitals and clinics continue their missions of mercy to the sick in the midst of this pandemic. Our schools and even our rehabilitation centers broadcast their lessons and exercise instructions to their students and clients. Within the Diocesan Office, we are laying plans to ease the plight of the unemployed and their families once there is freedom of movement to do so. And finally, prayer and worship continue within our churches, with services being streamed not only to the members of our congregations, but also to viewers from around the world, with some perhaps hearing the Gospel for the first time in a meaningful way. In short, despite being surrounded by death and suffering, we continue to proclaim the Good News of Christ’s Resurrection, both in word and deed.

I would like to thank all of our friends and partners around the world who are supporting us as we minister from the very city where the Resurrection took place, and where the Empty Tomb remains to this very day. We draw strength from your prayers and your tangible contributions to our work here in Jerusalem, allowing us to be more effective stewards of Christ’s redeeming grace.

May God bless you this Easter and beyond, as we exclaim to each other on that sacred morning, from wherever in the world we are, and in whatever language we speak: “Alleluia! Christ is Risen! The Lord is Risen, indeed! Alleluia!”