

It was dark, very dark, oh so dark that no light penetrated into the tomb of Christ where his body had been laid and the stone had been put in place to seal it from intruders. Outside the tomb, back in the upper room—scattered about the city—the followers and family of Jesus were mourning—they weren't only sad, some were shamed, all were frightened and they were unsure of anything. Without Jesus what would happen to them? They had lost their hope, their purpose in life, their sense of direction their very being. For Jesus had led them in a new way of living and now his very essence was gone.

Darkness covered the land, fear filled the followers and all seemed to be lost, when suddenly the stone sealing the tomb was rolled away and a brilliant light appeared dispelling the sense of loss and bringing with it renewed hope, faith and new understanding. THAT is what happened on Easter those millennia ago and THAT is what happens in the tomb of the crypt—the symbolic tomb—of Jesus in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre each year in Jerusalem. In non-covid years the church is packed with the faithful—local people and pilgrims from all over the world. The priests who are chosen to enter the Sepulchre do so with no matches, no inflammatory devices. Darkness prevails until suddenly—as if miraculously—light emerges from the Sepulchre. It is a reenactment of the Easter Story played out each year. And THIS year, where many if not all of us have felt as if we ourselves have been entombed, or at least forced to withdraw, not able to interact as we normally would have with friends and colleagues—**this year** we are finally coming to a place where the light is beginning to shine once more—where hope is flickering alive again—where life may actually hold more than the quarantines and the rigid requirements that living with and through a pandemic have required.

This year we are beginning to emerge into our world—a world familiar but a world that has changed in many ways. Just as the disciples and the family of Jesus retreated and then emerged from their grief, despair and confusion **we** are beginning to emerge from our own time of questioning, **our** fearful time—a time where concerns for others and ourselves, perhaps griefs for friends or family members who have died, the violence in our world or other personal losses have been on our minds and in our hearts. While some of these concerns and others may remain in our lives, today we still can come out of this past year-plus—like the disciples, **rejoicing**. For in Christ WE CAN rejoice. In Christ we **must** rejoice. We have lived through a difficult time and have come to this time and this day in our lives to The Vigil of the Easter of our Christian faith. For that alone we should be thanking Jesus. And yet, as on that first Easter Day some of us may feel like the disciples and the family of Jesus who still had doubts to overcome—remember Thomas? it's important to remember that much of

what we live with, in our day as in their day, is living with unknowns. And that's where Jesus comes into our lives to uphold us—to hold us—to keep us in his love.

As The Most Reverend Michael B. Curry wrote in his book, *Love Is The Way*, “There was a moment after Jesus was killed when some of his followers did not know that he had been raised from the dead. And two of them gave voice to that feeling of hopelessness when they said of Jesus, “We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.” Dashed hope is the experience of a nightmare in daylight and that's where faith matters. It is there and then that one makes a decision. As an old song says...”Somehow, love will prevail.”

In the moments of insecurity—in the moments of doubt—in the scary and fearsome times in our lives faith can and will carry us through. Think back to what held **you** together during these COVID times. What worked for you? What didn't work for you? Anyone like me start off with a plan to eat well, clean out cupboards and pray and meditate and take Covid as a retreat? And then cook and bake too much, clean and sort out less and find their early discipline faltered? I will say prayer and meditation have remained. There's hope. But maybe it's time for us all to do some Spring cleaning and toss out the things that kept us feeling anxious. Keep those things that supported and uplifted and led us through the darkest or more troubling moments. For, as Bishop Michael, also said, “Keep the faith, baby. Faith is trusting God, or just holding on to God, when your heart is breaking, when it's hard to see, when you don't understand, and even when you're mad at God.” God's definitely up to our anger, by the way, for God IS the loving presence that created the world and created each one of us, each little particle of life on our planet. God the Creator loves us so much that Jesus came to show us a new way, a way of trusting and loving ourselves and all the other selves surrounding us. We can stay angry, or frightened or just plain miserable, but why not ask yourself “What are you gonna do with your dash? That space between the birth date and the end date on your tombstone?” something Bishop Michael said Black preachers used to say. Whether we are out doing what we used to do, or doing what we want to do or even still living a more confined life, we **can** hold that love of God's precious gift in our hearts, in our minds, in our speech, in our actions and bring some light into the lives of those with whom we interact. So, what are **you** gonna do with this **your** Easter dash? Jesus suffered great pain in order for us to see the light and live in the light and shine the light on others.

Out of the darkness of the tomb came Christ, no longer entombed—no longer there—no longer restricted by his humanity—but **everywhere**. In the unexpected places, in the unappreciated moments, in the times of emptiness, loneliness—in ALL times and in ALL places Christ walks with us, receives us, forgives us and most of all

Christ LOVES us. Be joyful today and all days, for the gift of Christ and walk in Love's name, Alleluia and Amen!!!!