



“I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified”

An Easter message from Bishop Sani Ibrahim Azar

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Jerusalem

Matthew 28:1-6

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

It has now been many weeks since we have been confined to our homes. Our schools, businesses, guest houses, and even churches are closed. For the first time in our memories, there are no public Holy Week or Easter celebrations in Jerusalem, the city of the Resurrection. This is very hard. This situation is hard, not only for us here in the Holy Land, but for people in every country across the globe.

Holy Week and Easter are usually a time when Christians celebrate the Crucified and Risen Christ in an intentional way, first walking with Our Lord Jesus through his last days, and then rejoicing that Good Friday was not the end of the story. It is a great loss to not be able to do this with our sisters and brothers in Christ.

However, the truth is that this year is both very different, and somehow the same. This year, amid the global health crisis of COVID-19, we have again



entered the tomb with Jesus. We are sitting still, waiting, and watching for what God has in store. As always, we are trusting in the promise of the Resurrection, even in the shadow of the cross. As always, we are trusting that love is stronger than hate, light is stronger than darkness, and life is stronger than death.

And as always, on Easter morning—although from the safety of our own homes—we will again rejoice that “Up from the grave, He arose!” Alleluia!

In the Gospel according to Matthew, the women came to the tomb and were confused when they didn’t find Jesus where they last saw him. But the angel assured them: “He is not here! For He has been raised.” This year, we will not experience the Risen Christ in the usual way. This year, we will not celebrate the Resurrection in our church buildings, surrounded by flowers and Easter dresses and large family gatherings. Like the women at the tomb, we won’t find Jesus where we expected to find him. Yes, things will be different.

But we must look with Resurrection eyes. With Resurrection eyes, we can see that the Risen Christ is with us, wherever we are. With Resurrection eyes, we can see that even if we can only gather in small numbers to celebrate, this is how it was when Jesus arose from the tomb. There were just a few women there to witness the miracle! And yet because of them, the Good News has traveled throughout time and across the world to reach us today.

The Risen Christ today is leading us into new ways of living in community, new ways of loving our neighbors, new ways of serving God. This not only true for us in the Holy Land, it is true for the global church. We are all in this together: one world, one Body, with one amazing message which binds us together:

“He is not here! For he has been raised, as he said.” Alleluia, Christ is risen!

Finally, I want to share that during this time, I have been contemplating the story of Noah. Noah also suffered an unimaginable crisis. Noah faced uncertainty, for his family and for the world. But Noah did all that the Lord commanded him—including staying safely on the ark! And Genesis chapter 8 ends with this promise from God:

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‘I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.

As long as the earth endures,
seedtime and harvest, cold and heat,
summer and winter, day and night,
shall not cease.’

(Genesis 8:21-22)

Dear sisters and brothers: I know that you are looking for Christ who was crucified. I pray that during this Easter season, you will look with Resurrection eyes at the world, at our neighbors, and at the future—for God’s promises are sure, Christ has been raised, and Coronavirus is not the end of the story.

Alleluia, Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed, Alleluia.

Al Masih kam! Hakkan kam!