Reflection – Vigil of Easter, April 11 2020
St. Luke’s Lutheran Church, Park Ridge, IL
Pastor John E. Schumacher, BCC

For centuries the Church has gathered on this night for a watch service drawn from the most ancient Christian traditions and their even older Jewish antecedents. This night is called the Passover of our Lord, from death to life. Like our Jewish sisters and brothers at Passover we gather in the early evening and light candles. Like them we tell stories of the mighty acts of God, reading Hebrew Scripture and singing psalms.

Our forbearers kept vigil all night, waiting for sunrise – and for the Son to rise. At that moment new Christians were baptized so that they might “drown” in the baptismal waters and be raised with Christ from death to eternal life. They waited in hope for the resurrection.

We have experienced waiting over these past weeks.

We have waited in frustration – for yet undelivered orders from Amazon and eBay – for the opportunity to return to normal daily activities.

We have waited in fear for the delayed results of the COVID-19 test. We have waited for word about loved ones isolated in the hospital.

We have waited anxiously, wondering “how long” - as experts suggest, June or September, or next year.

John’s resurrection story tells us about waiting. Mary Magdalene, in tears, wandered in the garden at first light. She encountered a stranger. When she recognized him, she naturally sought to hug him. (You remember hugging?) But Jesus put her off - “Not yet. Wait.” – And sent her off to tell the other disciples. Tradition reports she ran with joy. Mary and those who believed her word could wait in joy for they had been given a glimpse of the resurrection.

We certainly know the gloom in which Mary wandered. We hear the rising numbers of diagnosis and deaths. We are reminded again of the inadequacy and inequity of our health care system. We are frustrated to see our government’s response hampered by partisan divisions. But even in the gloom we see flashes of light, signs of the resurrection’s promise of life –

- in the young couple running errands for their elderly neighbors,
- in the medical personnel and first responders who day after day get out of bed and return to their jobs,
- in the circles of sewers creating cloth masks,
- in the unnumbered people who are making financial contributions to services which assist their neighbors.

These signs grant us unanticipated moments of joy as we wait.

The Passover Seder looks back, remembering God’s past gracious acts, but always ends looking forward in joy and hope. It anticipates next year when all people may be free. Next year when there may be peace among all nations. Next year when all people may be gathered together.
In hope and joy we too wait for next year. Next year may we know more fully the power of the resurrection. Next year may all people know healing. Next year may those who mourn be comforted. Next year may we see equity in our sharing of health care resources. Next year may those who lead us act in dignity and humility. Next year may all who hunger be feed. Next year may there peace among all nations. Next year may we all be together to celebrate this night.

Wait – the resurrection is at hand.