Bishop’s Easter Message 2022

The Diocese of New Jersey

The Right Reverend William H. Stokes

*Alleluia.*

*Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us; \**

 *therefore let us keep the feast,*

*Not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, \**

 *but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. Alleluia.*

(Book of Common Prayer – p. 83)

So begins the great Easter hymn titled *Pascha Nostrum,* literally *“Our Passover.”* This “anthem” is comprised of a series of scripture verses from Paul’s epistles compiled by Thomas Cranmer for use in the 1552 Book of Common Prayer.[[1]](#endnote-1) Cranmer intended the hymn to be sung in place of the *Venite* on Easter Day.[[2]](#endnote-2) Today, our current Book of Common Prayer directs that the *Pascha Nostrum* is to be said or sung each day of Easter Week and may be used daily until Pentecost.[[3]](#endnote-3) I use the *Pasha Nostrum* in my daily devotions until Pentecost. It reminds me that Lent is over and we are called into new, Easter life: It underscores that Easter is not merely a day; it is a season, 50 days long. Easter is also a bold assertion by God of what God’s intentions are for the world in raising Christ from the dead.

*Christ, our Passover* *has been sacrificed for us.* For ancient Israel, Passover was God’s saving event, in which Moses led the people Israel out of the bondage of slavery in Egypt into the Promised Land. For Christians, Christ is God’s “saving event” calling us, leading us, out of bondage to the slavery of sin and death into the light of God’s love and life, love and life, here, now, today, in our world and in our lives. And we today, and our world, are desperately in need of this saving event.

We have suffered for three years from the COVID19 pandemic, in which millions of lives have been lost. The pall of grief has marked so much of our daily lives many have become numbed by its affects. Hatred, bitterness and violence, especially the violence of racial enmity and oppression, in this country and throughout much of the world continue to be embraced and accepted by too many. Authoritarianism is increasingly the coin of politicians not just overseas, but in this country. Images and accounts of on-going genocide and brutal war-crimes assault us on a daily basis and challenge us with a sense of helplessness. With all of this going on around us, the cuteness of Easter bunnies, of pastel eggs and festooned candy-filled baskets, though a delight for children young and old alike, cannot, and will not, lead to new life and new hope. Only Christ can do that – a risen Christ; a living, saving Christ who draws out of our sinfulness, who heals us, forgives us, calls us, beckons us into his risen life, a life lived in the fullness of God’s love and God’s light which is what Easter, and the resurrection are all about.

*Alleluia.*

*Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us; \**

 *therefore let us keep the feast,*

*Not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, \**

 *but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. Alleluia.*

*Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; \**

 *death no longer has dominion over him.*

*The death that he died, he died to sin, once for all; \**

 *but the life he lives, he lives to God.*

*So also consider yourselves dead to sin, \**

 *and alive to God in Jesus Christ our Lord. Alleluia.*

*Christ has been raised from the dead, \**

 *the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.*

*For since by a man came death, \**

 *by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.*

*For as in Adam all die, \**

 *so also in Christ shall all be made alive. Alleluia.* (BCP p. 83).

It is my prayer that we will all experience the Good News of this and every Easter – Christ is risen. In his Easter rising may we all be made alive again, truly alive in God’s love and God’s light, in God’s resurrection power.

Susan joins me in wishing you and yours a blessed and joyful Eastertide.

1. Variations of what is now the *Pascha Nostrum* were included in both the 1549 and 1552 Book of Common Prayer. See “Pascha Nostrum” in *Wikipedia* at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pascha_Nostrum> as well as Hatchett, Marion J., *Commentary on the American Prayer Book* (The Seabury Press, 1980) p. 104 – 105. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The *Venite* is verses of Psalm 95 said or sung as an anthem of praise to God in Morning Prayer and has been so sung in the western church since the practice of Daily Office began. See Hatchett, Marion J., *Commentary on the American Prayer Book* (The Seabury Press, 1980) p. 104 – 105. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. See Book of Common Prayer (1979) p. 83 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)