

Grace to you from God, our Creator, and from our risen Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

This coming Tuesday, April 14<sup>th</sup>, the day after tomorrow, marks Yom Hashoah – Holocaust Remembrance Day. It was instituted by Israel’s parliament in 1951 and formally enacted as a law in 1959 to remember the Jewish people who perished in WWII, and also those who resisted the atrocities that were being committed.

The word “genocide” was coined by Raphael Lemkin, a Polish Jew who worked to expand the definition of genocide to include “the attempted destruction not only of ethnic and religious groups, but also political ones,” and he also thought that the term should encompass systematic cultural destruction.

So, on Tuesday, we’ll remember not only the 6 million Jews who perished at the hands of the Nazis, but also the other 3-4 million people whom the Nazis deemed undesirable, which includes: people in the LGBTQ+ community, gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses, Soviet POW’s, Slavic people, and people who were physically or mentally disabled.

As we remember that event, we’re reminded of other mass murders that have been carried out in places like Serbia and Rwanda. The Armenian people of Azerbaijan. The Rohingya people of Myanmar. The people of Gaza. The threat that our president recently made about Iran.

Those are just the recent ones.

We also remember that death by human conflict isn’t the only kind of death. So, we also remember people whose lives have been destroyed by severe weather, climate disasters, and other accidents – those who died and those who are left to rebuild.

There is a lot of death in our world. That has been true throughout human history. Some of its causes are out of our control. But we also know that humans are capable of doing some pretty horrific things to each other.

And it’s in those instances that we’re reminded that God didn’t wait for the world to be perfect before walking among us as Jesus. And that, although, Christ’s resurrection didn’t take away death or the horrors that people commit, it shows us who Jesus needs and calls us to be in this world.

Our reading takes place on Easter night. Jesus had appeared to Mary Magdalene early that same morning. And this story is often called simply “Doubting Thomas.” But I think Thomas gets a bad rap.

The dictionary defines “doubt” as “uncertainty or suspension of judgment.” But there isn’t a shred of doubt in what Thomas says. He’s very clear. He was speaking from that place we’ve all been when “normal” comes to a screeching halt, and everything we’d hoped for comes crashing down.

He was there with Jesus throughout his ministry. He hoped that Jesus was who he said he was – that he was the one the prophecies talked about. Thomas knew what he expected of the Messiah, and it meant a lot to him.

But he was also there on Good Friday. He saw the nails and the blood, and heard the shouts and cries of pain. He saw how broken Jesus’ body was when they took him off the cross. Jesus wasn’t breathing. He didn’t have a pulse. He was dead.

Earlier that Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene was the only one who’d seen Jesus. And Thomas wasn’t there when the risen Christ appeared to the other disciples later in the day.

So, it’s no wonder he wanted some kind of proof. He didn’t want to get his hopes up again.

And a week later, Thomas got the gift he asked for. Jesus got into that dark place in Thomas’ heart and broke it wide open and flooded it with life again, saying, “Peace be with you.” And Thomas responded, “My Lord and my God!”

The gospel writer had us in mind when he recorded this account. Jesus’ words to Thomas are also meant for us. We’re among many who haven’t seen the risen Christ in the same way that Mary and Thomas and the rest of the disciples did. And we have come to believe, nonetheless.

The risen Christ still appears to us, too. And we are witnesses to the forgiveness, love, grace, and mercy of God that he brings to our world.

They’re the experience of the power of Christ’s resurrection. They’re the experiences of the power of the light of Christ that triumphs and shines hope in even the deepest darkness. It’s the power that meets us where we are and says, “Touch this – you can trust it.”

And when we respond to Christ’s commission to go out and bear witness to this power, it doesn’t mean that we go out and do it by force. It’s actually quite the opposite. When we authentically bear witness to God’s grace and mercy, it means we do it the same way Christ did – lovingly and peacefully.

And we don't only do this as individuals. We're also commissioned to proclaim and witness as a congregation – that proclamation and witness is part of God's mission. We are part of God's mission. The Holy Spirit empowered us in our baptism to go out and proclaim the Good News of Christ's resurrection.

We can't make sense of why Hitler ordered the extermination of ten million people. We can't make sense of why Israel systematically destroyed the infrastructure in Gaza and continues to go after the Palestinian people, and now the people of Lebanon.

And our current president's threat to destroy the Iranian civilization last week is just disturbing.

The history books will tell us what was said, what led up to it, or what was thought. But events like genocide shouldn't ever make sense.

Alongside all this, scientists and climatologists continue to warn us about the need to rethink the way we live before things become catastrophic and human-caused damage to our planet becomes irreparable.

With all of this that's going on, it's sometimes hard to remember who Jesus needs us to be and calls us to be in this world.

Because it's sometimes hard to hold onto the light of the risen Christ. And it's tempting to think that his light has gone out of our world. But it hasn't. And it doesn't mean that we can't still proclaim Christ's resurrection in those broken places. Because that's exactly where it ought to be proclaimed.

Will we have to work harder to do it? Yeah, sometimes. Will there be times when some of the people affected need proof of Christ's peace and light? Yes. But it's in those times that we have to work at it the hardest that it's the most important.

And during the times in our lives when we are in a place of such bewilderment or confusion that we can't really be witnesses to others, that's when we depend on them to do it for us. To witness to us. To show us the light and peace of the risen Christ shining through them, and remind us of the very real hope brought forth through his resurrection.

We are witnesses to the love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness of God that Christ brings to our world. And our witness matters!

It matters if we go out and proclaim God's love. It matters if we go out and heal the wounds of others. It matters if we go out and feed the hungry. It matters if we go out and embody the light and peace of Christ in the face of atrocities.

It matters if we do these things. Because if we don't do it, who will?

In a world where violence seems to be commonplace and promoted as a way of life. In a world where lives are destroyed by things that we can't prevent. In a world where people get lost in the shuffle or fall through the cracks. In a world hungering for an enduring peace, the risen Christ continues to repeat again and again, "Peace be with you."

We are witnesses to the forgiveness, love, mercy, grace, and peace of God that Christ brings to our world. And our witness matters!

Peace be with you. Alleluia! Amen.