

Easter Sunday  
April 21, 2019  
St. James, Wheat Ridge

By the Rev. Becky Jones

Easter came late this year,  
but somehow it felt like Good Friday came early.  
About four days early, actually.

When Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris caught fire  
on Monday of Holy Week  
it seemed like the whole world caught its collective breath,  
and began to pray for the deliverance  
of the 850-year-old cathedral.

But nowhere was the fear and grief and horror more palpable  
than in the streets of Paris itself,  
where throngs of people gathered  
and sang to Our Lady of Paris  
as she battled for her life.

People who would never describe themselves as Christian,  
people who may never actually go to church to worship,  
nevertheless found themselves praying  
that that church would survive.  
Because the thought of living in a world  
where Notre Dame Cathedral no longer exists  
is simply too painful to contemplate.  
Many people didn't realize how much the old cathedral meant to them  
until Monday,  
when things looked really, really bad.

On Monday, it felt like Good Friday,  
because something we dearly loved,  
something we knew in our hearts to be somehow sacred,  
appeared to be doomed.  
And the world had little reason to believe  
that the news from Notre Dame  
would be anything but catastrophic.

You saw the video. You saw the flames.  
You saw the cathedral spire collapse.  
You saw that old building dying.  
The view of Easter Sunday is never murkier  
than through the haze of Good Friday.

But now, with the flames extinguished and the smoke cleared,  
the sun has again risen over Paris,  
and the news reports are miraculously good:  
The Cathedral of Notre Dame still stands.  
It is scorched and battered,  
and missing its spire and much of its roof.  
It has some holes poked in it.  
But most of the treasures it held were saved.  
And that magnificent building,  
the work of human hands  
created for the glory of God,  
will rise again,  
just like the Savior it was built to honor.

Already, more than \$1 billion has been pledged  
from people the world over  
who know that our world still needs  
Notre Dame Cathedral.  
Just like our world still needs Jesus Christ.

Much of the world may not be able to put into words  
just WHY that is,  
but as this past week's events have shown us,  
the world yearns to maintain a connection  
to that which is holy.  
Even a world that grows more and more secular with each passing day,  
a world that seems to have forgotten much of the old, old story;  
a world increasingly uncomfortable with religious doctrine,  
that world still recognizes the deep longing within each of us  
to hold onto that which transcends our human lives.

Like Mary Magdalene in the garden that first Easter morning,  
who so desperately wanted to touch her Lord,  
often we humans need that which is visible, tangible, touch-able,

in order to point us in the direction of that which is not,  
but which is no less real.

There is something so Easter-like about this story.  
You don't have to be particularly religious  
to see the connection  
between a bloody, broken and dying Jesus  
and an all-consuming fire  
nearly destroying one of the world's most iconic and beloved churches  
in the very week we are meant to ponder the Paschal Mystery.

Of all the photos taken of that fire,  
one in particular stands out in my mind.  
It was taken from above, at night,  
and it shows graphically what happens to a church  
when the 800-year-old timbers that form its roof  
go up in flames.

But beyond that, the image is unmistakable.  
Those medieval architects designed the cathedral  
in the shape of a cross.  
And there it was:  
a glowing red cross,  
beaming out its powerful message  
into the Parisian night sky:  
"In the cross of Christ I glory,  
towering o'er the wrecks of time;  
all the light of sacred story  
gathers round its head sublime."

And so the world came together that dreadful day  
because that's what we humans do  
when the world as we have always known it  
is in danger of collapsing around us.  
We seek each other out.  
We cling to each other.  
We cry in each other's arms.  
We pray.  
We sing.  
When we're looking on in horror,

it helps to have a hand to hold.

That's what they did in Paris on Monday,  
and that's what the first disciples did in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago  
on that first Good Friday.  
They were bereft and horrified.  
And they had no reason to believe  
that things would turn out like they did.

And therein lies the joy and the mystery of Easter.  
Easter is always a surprise!  
There was no way for those first disciples  
to anticipate what happened.  
Well, you might argue,  
Jesus TOLD them what was going to happen.  
But the meaning of his words just didn't sink in.  
Not then, and often, not now.

Across time and down through the centuries,  
here's something else all people have in common,  
whether we realize it or not:  
All people need a savior.  
All people need somehow to connect  
with the Divine in a way that brings about transformation.

Like Mary in the garden,  
at first, we may not know it when we see it.  
We may be fooled into thinking  
that that feeling we have,  
urging us to become our best selves,  
isn't brought about by God.  
No, we imagine that it's brought about by art.  
Or architecture.  
Or history.  
Only later do we see  
that it really was our savior standing there, all along,  
simply taking on a guise that we were prepared to accept.

We want a savior who is real,  
and so the Risen One who meets us now  
comes to us in different forms.  
Some of us meet him in Scripture and Sacraments,  
some in prayer or in music,  
Some of us meet him in service to others.  
Some of us meet him in the faces of our loved ones.  
Some of us meet him in creation,  
in the stars that fill the sky,  
in the mountains or the ocean.  
Some of us still meet him in a garden.  
And some of us meet him in an inexplicable desire  
to restore an ancient cathedral.

We don't always know when or where  
we will encounter our Savior.  
At times, we must wait in the ashes of devastation,  
when all the signs point to disaster.  
But for those of us who are Christians  
we've become accustomed  
to having something surprisingly, undeservedly good  
come along when we least expect it.

And so we wait to see what God might say  
to enable us to walk out of those cold ashes  
that mark the crises and disappointments of our lives.  
We wait to see what miracle God might provide  
to enable us to restore  
whatever within us is broken and ruined.

Today, we wait no longer.  
The Risen Christ calls out to each of us  
in whatever form of voice we can hear.  
He calls us by name.  
He calls us to be his beloved disciples.  
He calls us to follow him.

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