

Easter 2020

General Minister and President Teresa “Terri” Hord Owens

Transcript of sermon provided via YouTube



Good Morning, Church! Happy Resurrection Sunday! This is your General Minister and President, Terri Hord Owens, and I am so excited to be gathered with you across our entire Church in the US and Canada to worship together on Easter morning.

We had great expectations for Easter, as we always do. We planned and executed part of our Lenten studies, we were preparing for Special Music, special sermons, our children were going to give their wonderful Easter speeches, we would have dramas, we would invite friends and family to worship with us on Easter Sunday. And at my house, the entire Owens family gathers each year for Easter dinner, and I’m the cook: I’m normally cooking on Easter weekend in addition to everything else.

But none of this happened the way we had expected it. Our society is in the midst of a disruption the likes of which we have never seen in our entire lives, and we have been clinging and holding on to familiar things and traditions that give us comfort, even as we are forced to try new ways and learn new things about how we can bring worship to the masses when we cannot physically gather.

We’ve been reaching out because we cannot physically comfort those who are sick and grieving. We have not been able to gather for celebrations. And yet, we’ve been holding on to the familiar, hoping that surely when this is all over, things will go back to the way they have been.

But, Church, we are in a new world and it is unlikely that things will ever be the same again. And that, I argue, is a good thing. Our good friend, Walter Bruggeman, in his book, *The Prophetic Imagination*, talks about the importance of the ministry of imagination. “It’s important to imagine first, and then implement,” he said, “because anything can be implemented.” We must prepare, ourselves, Church, for that ministry of imagination, not only for being relevant in the new world, but as Church, to help **shape** that new world: grounding ourselves in the Spirit, feeding ourselves on scripture, giving ourselves the courage to

imagine, the courage to do, the courage to change, the courage to live beyond the disruptions—in new ways, the courage to help shape a new world, permission to change, permission to let things go, and freedom from fear of what will happen when we do change. It's not an option any more: this is the world we are in.

That first Easter was filled with disruptions of all sorts. On Friday, those women, and the disciple John stood at the foot of the cross witnessing one of the most horrific deaths known to humankind. Jesus died; beaten, battered, and bloodied on a cross, and when he was laid in the tomb, those days between Friday and Sunday must have been the most devastating of their lives: his followers, all around the countryside, traumatized, afraid, and in exile.

Mary and the women were clinging to those familiar rituals and traditions as they went to the tomb that Sunday morning, hoping to anoint the Lord's body. They hadn't been able to do it on the Sabbath, so they went, intent on being sure that what they knew was right was done.

And as they arrive at the tomb, another disruption! The stone has rolled away, the tomb is empty, and Jesus' body is not there. They run to get Peter and the other disciple who come to take a look and one disciple looks in, but doesn't go in, but believes. Peter goes in, and they leave, going back to their homes. Mary is left there in the garden, weeping. And at a certain point, she gets up to go into the tomb, and sees two angels: one sitting at the head and the other at the foot, in the place where Jesus had been laid.

They asked her, "Why are you crying, who are you looking for?"

And she says, "I do not know what they have done to my Lord, and if you know where they have taken his body, please tell me, so that I can go and retrieve it."

As she turns around, she sees someone she thinks is the gardener, and he says, "Why are you crying? Who are you looking for?"

And she says, "Sir, if you know where my Lord is, please tell me where I can find him."

He calls her name, and it is then that she knows that it is Jesus. "MARY!" He assures her that he is fine, he will ascend to the creator, but that she is to go and tell the disciples that he is alive and will soon meet them in Galilee.

Another disruption! Mary, a **woman**, is given the awesome responsibility of sharing the gospel news that Jesus has risen, for the very first time in all of history.

Mary runs to tell the disciples, and I'm sure they all imagined that things would simply go back to the way they were! Jesus is alive! They'll have dinner at Mary and Martha's house in Bethany. He will eat with us, he will talk with us, people will come and listen to his teaching and he will heal them. It will all be like it was before.

But they did not yet understand the meaning of the resurrection. They didn't yet understand what Jesus meant by this "Kingdom of God" that he had been talking about. Before he ascends, he reminds them that he will send to them the Holy Spirit who will teach them and remind them about what he has taught. He charges them to go and tell the story of his death and resurrection; baptizing them in the name of his father, the son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them everything that they have been taught by him.

Church, if ever there is a time when we must claim this prophetic imagination and claim the courage to change, it is now, in the midst of disruption! The Church of Jesus Christ was **born** in disruption! People, not understanding what would come of Jesus' death, not understanding the new normal, the new world that they would inhabit once he ascended into Heaven. That first Church gathered in their homes. They did radical things like put all their resources together to ensure that everyone had enough. They kept the tradition of the Lord's Supper, which we continue to this day, remembering Jesus' death and resurrection until he comes again. They told stories and shared testimonies. They were living new lives, trying to create a new world—and two thousand years later, we are carrying their traditions with us. But we have our own disruption to which we must respond.

Church, we must be ready not only to help imagine a new world, but to help shape the new world that is surely coming. And I want to remind you that there **will be Church** after this! There will be hope and glory and love after this disruption. There will be peace and joy after this disruption, and even in the midst, because of Christ. I hope that you will continue to feed your spirits on the Word of God, to listen to the teaching of the Holy Spirit, to gather **as we can** gather and feed and support one other.

But I pray that your prophetic imagination takes flight, and that we are all able to have the courage to imagine this new world that is already here, and how we will be Church in it, and how we will help to shape the world, so that it will become that Kingdom of God where all are welcome and all have enough.

This is my prayer, my hope, this is the imagination to which God calls us.

Get ready, Church.

God loves you, and so do I.