



2021 Easter Sermon from Bishop Sani Ibrahim Azar

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land

Salaam and grace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

“Who will roll the stone away for us?” Mark 16:3

For the past year, we have all been faced with a very large stone indeed—the COVID-19 pandemic—which has blocked many aspects of our lives.

Borders have been closed, schools have been closed, churches have been closed, and at times, the doors to hospitals have been closed when there were no more beds for sick patients. Large numbers of Israelis have been vaccinated, but a majority of Palestinians still lack access to the vaccine. Families who work in the tourism sector are facing a devastating second year without Holy Land tourists. At the same time, we are watching the elections in Israel and Palestine. Will these newly elected politicians deal with the stones of greed, of injustice, of occupation, as well as the pandemic?

And so, we ask along with the women at the tomb: Who will roll away this stone for us?

In Jerusalem this Easter, we are overjoyed for the opportunity to gather with our church communities once again! But even as we celebrate how God rolled away the stone and raised Jesus from the tomb, granting us all eternal life, still our church members face many obstacles in this life. The world is not at all “normal.” In fact, it seems our lives may never look the way they once did.

But as Christians celebrating Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, perhaps it is good to remember that the life of disciple is not about seeking the “normal”. People of the Resurrection are about embracing the impossible,



the extravagant, and the miraculous. Through the resurrection of Jesus, God urges us not to look backward to what was, but always forward to what is to come.

At the tomb, after the stone was rolled away, the angel said to the women, "Look. Here is where they laid him! But now....go. Go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you."

It would have been easy for the women to stay at the tomb, to look to the past and mourn all that had been lost. For some of us today, who have lost so much, that might be the just right place to place to stay for a moment. But the resurrection of Jesus is the sign that we don't need to sit at the tomb forever. The stone has been rolled away! Christ is raised to new life, and so are we.

For this reason, we can go forward unafraid, knowing that Jesus goes before us. We don't know what is to come, but we are confident that the Risen Christ will walk with each of us into the months ahead. Strengthened by Jesus' presence, as well as by our faithful friends and partners across the world, the churches, schools, and ministries of the ELCJHL will continue to boldly share the Gospel of love in the land of the Resurrection. Filled with the Holy Spirit, we also commit ourselves to never place a stone in the way of our neighbors. Every human, created in the image of God, has the right to live, to love, and to flourish in this world.

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

May the peace of Christ which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

+ Azar

Bishop Sani-Ibrahim Azar

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