This morning, we sit between the cross and an empty grave.  Saturday, of Holy Week, is normally filled with silence.  But this year, in the midst of Covid-19, and the knowledge that we will not be able to gather tomorrow to celebrate the resurrection, I have something for you to think about.

              While there will be no breakfast or Easter egg hunt, no flowers or new dresses, and while this is likely the only time any of us have ever missed an Easter celebration, this is not the first time Christians have “missed” Easter.

              The world has experienced war and famine and plagues in the past.  Our brothers and sisters in Christ, throughout history, at times have had to post-pone their plans, because of some tragedy.  Some have had to flee their homes, their countries, their churches.

              One such individual is a Syrian, named John.  Who in 2014 was forced to flee Holy Trinity Evangelical Church, in the city of Kessab, because of al-Qaeda linked rebel fighters.  John’s words are an encouragement to us, “In the midst of these circumstances we keep our eyes upward, our identity is in Christ, not in our gatherings.”

              About half of those churches in Syria and Iraq, lost 60 percent of their original membership during the war.  The loneliness for those remaining was terrible, said John, as friends and family emigrated elsewhere – likely to never return.

              They kept in touch, through daily prayers and readings.  Much like we are currently doing.

              Experiences like this, have happened throughout the world, throughout history.

              When asked about isolation, Angaelos, an Egyptian Coptic Monk, responded, “I am a monk, I’ll be fine.”  He added, “I’m not alone, I am with God.”

              This year, the monasteries of Egypt have pledged to devote all their energy toward prayer for the church, and the world, Angaelos shared.  Prayer keeps us connected.

              Gregory Mansour, the Maronite bishop of Brooklyn offers the following prayer in the midst of Covid-19:

*“O Divine Ocean of mercy and compassion, be with us in our time of trial and difficulties.*

*Today I make an act of spiritual communion with you, the life-giving Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.*

*At this time I am not able to receive the sacred body and blood of my Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ, but I choose to live in union with him and in the unity of the Holy Spirit.*

*I offer my day, my daily life, my joys and sorrows to you, for those around me, and for the whole world.*

*Be with us, O life-giving Triune God, for we know that nothing in this world has power over us.*

*O Lover of all people, have mercy on us and on the whole world.”*

              Mansour goes on to encourage, “neither plague nor persecution can snuff out the church of Christ.”

              Let us spend today in prayer, for the church and for the world, as together all humanity fights against Covid-19.

grace and peace to you,

pastor mike

I received my information from an article in Christianity Today.  The link for the original article is as follows…

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2020/april/easter-covid-19-arab-christians-coronavirus-isis-iraq-syria.html>