

“See you on the other side!” (Matthew 28:1-10)

“Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.” So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”

Will you play a little guessing game with me? I will tell you a story. A true story. And you will have to guess what it is about. It won't be too difficult, I promise! Ready? Let's go!

Before it happened, everything was good. We could say that everything was very good. Everyone was doing what they were supposed to. Everyone and everything were flourishing. Interactions were bountiful and relationships were full of joy. Work well done bore good fruits. Good times awaited ahead.

Suddenly, in an instant everything changed. It wasn't good anymore. It felt like something dark and scary had descended upon us. So precious time together was cut short, relationships were torn apart.

All economic activities had changed, and some have even ceased. And then, there was this fear, the fear of lacking, the fear on not having enough, the fear of death that would take everything away from us.

Suddenly people had begun to appreciate many ordinary things that they used to have. Things that were taken so much for granted that we almost didn't notice their existed. That was such a painful wake-up call.

People were longing to go back to how it was. But there was no going back. And it was also hard to go forward. No one knew what awaited ahead. Those were uncharted territories. “See you on the other side!” Perhaps that was one of common greetings. “See you on the other side!” When it is over...

Okay, what do you think, what is this story about? Sure, it is about us. But no! it is not about the COVID19 pandemic that we are experiencing right now. This story has been passed on to us from the very beginning.

It is as ancient as the humanity itself. It is about the events recorded for us in the very first book of the Bible, in Genesis chapter Three. We know this tragic

event as the Fall... This is the story from that time when the original very good order was lost, and chaos and confusion came into the world. When people got separated from the very fountain of life. When distrust and jealousy, blame and guilt and shame once and for all tainted our relationships and lives.

When what was taken for granted – the most precious, the most significant things – our unique status and dignity, life and health, harmony and peace, joy and goodness were gone. Lost...

There was someone who was particularly disappointed with what had happened. But He wasn't that sort of person who would just turn away from challenging situations. He wasn't that sort of person who would abandon others, even if those others had abandoned and rejected Him.

He made a promise, publicly, that He will restore the lost goodness regardless of the cost, regardless of what price He would need to pay. He has been working tirelessly since to fulfill this promise. To bring forth the day when we will come out on the others side, and He has gone to incredible length to make sure that as many as possible make it through. He is our God...

When we survey the history of the humanity as recorded in the Bible, this is the one thing that stands out, – that the Triune God has remained faithful to His promise, that He has never stopped working on the ultimate solution, for the ultimate goal... to see as many of us as possible on the other side.

We can't fully understand all the "hows", but the Scripture are clear that what have brought entire creation under the curse – those are the consequences of our choices and actions. The creation that initially was very good, has now become exceedingly hostile to us.

However, we can see that the Triune God has graciously used every situation, every challenge in our way, every hardship, every suffering to advance His ultimate goal, to bring us back where we belong, where our true home is – into the divine fellowship with Him, our Maker and Redeemer.

As famous Christian writer C. S. Lewis put it: "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

Plagues, wars, famines, catastrophes, and so on. He has used all of them for our ultimate good, and for those who responded to His never ceasing call, for those who love God, for them all things have worked out for good.

By the way, the above mentioned are exactly the things that the Scripture lists as the signs of the end times. On the one hand the Gospel will be preached to all the nations, on the other hand, there will be great tribulations. Think about this!

Today we witness something that the world has never experienced before. The Gospel is indeed being preached to all the nations. Not just by Bible translations

in thousands of languages and dialects, not just by printed materials, not just on TV and radio, but also by means of Internet and mobile networks. For example, you can go to the poorest country in Asia, Nepal, and you can drive to the most remote villages and you will see children playing with their mobile phones. Being able to hear the Gospel just were they are.

You could say, that's the problem, that too many people spend too much time in front of their screens. And now, look! Our God has suddenly sent all the servants of the Word online. How many sermons today can be heard online?!

And now we also have this scary pandemic happening. It doesn't matter how dangerous it is or isn't, but it had forced us to pause. The Scripture tells us, both in words of Jesus and also in vision of the Book of Revelation that God will use such "loud" measures to get our attention, especially at the end.

Why? Remember, He wants everyone to make it through, He wants to see you on the other side, with Him. This current pandemic is indeed a great metaphor that helps us to rethink the fallen state of humanity and where we are heading.

Yes, our heavenly Father still graciously provides for us even after the Fall, despite all our efforts to drive Him away. The essentials are there, even if we fail to distribute them in a fair way. As are our essentials during this pandemic.

But the colors are taken away from our lives, the abundant richness of cultural activities... gone. The beautiful bouquet of human face to face interactions ... gone. The joy and meaning of good work... for so many it's lost...

Besides we are stuck in this unenviable situation without a clear way out. This pandemic has revealed with painful clarity how limited we are. How misplaced our trust in our reason and abilities to control our lives is. Suddenly a little invisible bug has put entire world on our knees.

Think about this – we can see it clearly on the level of this pandemic – how limited we are and incapable to solve real problems – whatever direction we choose, whatever steps we take, they will lead to a disaster.

We just don't know which disaster will be worse in a long run. But in the same way we all face similar situation in our lives, when there often is no choice between good and evil, just too evils lurking at us... and there is no way for us to know, which of them will hurt us more in a long run.

In all these situations our God invites us to return to Him, the only One who can provide solutions when our limited wisdom and abilities fail us. To some extent this pandemic is helpful for us to assess our situation, to stop and reflect on it, and, what is really important, to stir up our deep longing, to get through this valley of death and to come out on the other side, and to center our attention and lives to the One who can help us.

I don't know how this pandemic will end or when, or even if. What I fear is that some fallen, but ambitious and influential human beings for whom their ends justify any means will want to use this situation to advance their agendas.

My guess is that from now on we will be living not only after the Fall with all the consequences, but also after the COVID19 with all that it brings. Our future is this world looks uncertain and possibly not that safe.

But, now let's get back to the grand story of humanity. The feel is totally different here. There is no uncertainty! There is no dimness regarding our future in the age to come! It is clearer and much more hopeful than anyone could ever dream of. Why would I say that?

Because of today. Because of what happened today almost two millennia ago. Because of Jesus. Because of His bodily resurrection. Because He is the first who has come out on the other side.

Alive and more than that... bursting out the streams of living water, as a fountain of life without the end. As a virus has no power over people who have gained immunity, similarly neither sin, nor devil nor death has any power over risen and glorious Jesus Christ.

He is immune to these ultimate enemies of ours. And He offers cure to everyone who is enlightened enough to recognize that we are dying. To everyone who desires it. To everyone who wants to come out on the other side.

Not as a survivor, somehow, barely making it, no! But as a glorious being, restored to the power and wisdom and beauty for which we were created. If you could see what the Triune God plans to make of you, your breath would be taken away and tears of joy and gratitude would run down your smiling face.

For those who accept Jesus' invitation, the other side looks very different than our present. There will be no more sickness, no more mourning, no more pain, no more loneliness, no more unfulfilled heart-braking longings, no more death.

Everything that we have been longing for unknowingly – our significance, affirmation, wisdom, joy, meaning, love, adventures – all of that will be abundantly yours. See, these are too great a news not to shout about them.

That was the will and desire of our Lord Jesus Christ that everyone [!] would learn the truth both about our situation, – that we live in the time of cosmic pandemic, called sin and death, but especially about the cure that He offers.

The cure is to be reunited with the Triune God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, to be embrace in this divine fellowship with this gracious God. When He dwells with you, when you are united with Him, the very source of eternal life and everything good, there is nothing that could prevent Him from getting you to the other side. Nothing!

Our God desires everyone to know these Great News, therefore He has sent His people to the ends of the Earth. The first Twelve are especially encouraging for us. They had seen just a glimpse of what the other side will look like, they had seen the risen Jesus Christ, and that was enough to transform them forever.

They sacrificed their lives so that only we too could receive the Great News. And now it is our turn to be Jesus' witnesses, to keep the message going. With God's help, we will do it so that as many as possible could make it through.

And in case if you have any doubts, if case you can't believe that God's invitation applies also to you, just go and read the testimony of the Scriptures. There is no one too insignificant for Jesus, for He does not see us as we are now, but as the glorious beings He will make us in the age to come.

There is no sin greater than God's grace and forgiveness. There is nothing you might have done that would cancel God's invitation. Not even our foolishness, He will teach us. Not even our selfishness, He will change our hearts. Not even our complacency nor arrogance, He is patient. Not even our hatred and disbelieve, He is used to the worst rejection possible. Remember, He went to the cross and into death for us, for you.

He is stronger than any obstacle that we could put in His road, and He is out to get us to the other side. He is waiting for you, for each one of you, and as soon as you turn to Him, you can be sure, that you will see the other side. And not only that. On the other side you will be greeted and embraced as a long-lost beloved son or daughter. Yes, by Him. By risen Jesus Christ.

He is risen!

He is risen, indeed!

Amen.