Let me start today with a little cynicism, because nothing says Easter Morning like cynicism – but hey you hired me. Here is my cynical statement 83.74% of all the promises people are making during this time of quarantine will be forgotten. All of the Facebook posts about how this has made people realize what is really important, how we can all get by with fewer things and how we will seek joy in the small things will disappear. Or to paraphrase Helmuth von Moltke, “No plan of operations extends with any certainty beyond the first contact with the end of quarantine.” So why do I start Easter Sunday on such a down note. Maybe because in the 2000 or so years since Christ the Lord was risen today the world still does not seem all that different -- most people go on content in their own pettiness, fearful of life and fearful of death. That’s not what it is supposed to be like. St. Paul in Colossians says, “If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” But are we setting our minds on the things above? Have we really died to the old self and is our life now hidden with Christ in God? Or is there still a lot of the old-self floating around? Well here is the thing; I think Easter actually speaks to both realities. The first reality is that we will disappoint. Many of the promises we have made to get better will vanish like toilet paper at Costco. But here is the other reality: things really have changed. Death no longer is the final word and we can be united with God forever thorough the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Let me see if I can explain how these two realities are both with us in Easter.

When I was in college I had a friend who was always teetering on the brink of financial disaster. He is the one who upon getting a credit card proclaimed, “The way I look at it, its all the money I want for just $25 a month.” Every now and then some money would come in, maybe through a student loan or a check from grandma and he would metaphorically wipe his brow and say, ”whew I’m glad that’s over” and go back to doing exactly what got him into financial trouble in the first place. I don’t want this pandemic to end like that. I don’t want us to wipe our brow and say, “whew I’m glad that’s over” and then happily go back to being the same people we were before. But at the same time I know that we are not going to reach the Kumbaya inflection point upon the end of quarantine. And so what does Easter have to say to this? Going back to my friend I think Easter is the hope that my friend would start paying $35 a month towards his credit card balance. It will not make him financially sound but it’s a little better than he was before.

Here is the thing, for me personally, I live with two parts of myself. One part that greatly wants to be a better person, but another part that tells me I’m good enough, or we can work on getting better some other time. In some ways it is useful to think of my personality as, “yes, but…” That is I acknowledge that everything changed on Easter but I am fairly content with the status quo. I don’t have the motivation to fully embrace who Jesus is and what he did. I may be fearful, I may be lazy or I may be delusional but whatever the case I never fully commit. But in some ways that is the point of Easter.

Yes we should come out of this better, we should strive to be better and changed people, but the resurrection is an acknowledgement that on some level we are always going to fall short. If we want to put it crudely we could say that God is a little cynical. God knows that no matter how many promises we make or new leafs we promise to turn over he knows that it is not going to end perfectly. He knows we are always going to stumble and fall. And that it is only through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that it will be fixed that we will be made right with God. In many ways Christianity is the ultimate religion of the cynic because baked into it is the idea that we are going to mess up, that we are not going to get it quite right. And so maybe what we need in order to come out better on the other end is to maybe not to focus so much on how we can be better, but rather focus on how we can be grateful and humble for what God has done. Because the fact of the matter is we are not going to get everything right. We may be better on certain days, but on some level we will ultimately disappoint. We will not follow through on all our promises, we will lose our temper, we will be ungrateful and will commit any host of sins you want to name.

Watching how the great coronavirus Olympics is being played out in political circles there is constant jockeying to make everything someone else’s fault. If someone had started a little earlier on quarantine, if someone had a better model and so on. The thought being that if we can blame the other side then we can declare ourselves good and pure and clean. But that is not the Biblical narrative. Jesus tells us there is no one good but God. None of us are good enough. But the great thing is we worship a God who knows this and wanted to be with us so much that he sent his son to die on a cross for the people that put him there in the first place. Is it cynical? – Probably -- but is it also the most loving thing that anyone could do, or has ever done.

The 17th century French Archbishop Francois Fenelon said, “We conceive of [God] as a powerful being who demands much of us, who does not want us to have a good time…If you think like this you may ‘fear God.’ But you only fear him. You do not love him…Wouldn’t you prefer the service of one who loves you as your child?”

If we just believe in the first part of Fenelon’s statement life is hopeless. If we worship a God who operates like an earthly judge, we are sunk. We will never come out of the other side of quarantine, Easter, or any other event good enough to earn God’s favor. But fortunately for us we worship a God who also loves us. Would God like us to stop sinning, would God like for the world to be a place where we love one another? – Sure he would and he wants us to aim for this. But God also knows that we are going to fall short, because Christ’s death and resurrection, if nothing else, is a declaration that we are not going to pull it off. No matter how hard we try we will miss the mark. The joy that we have on Easter is not that we have suddenly been made better, the joy we have on Easter is in the realization that God knows we have not been made better but loves us all the same. If we want to know what God’s love looks like look at the events of this week. We see it on Good Friday when Christ is flogged and crucified for our sins and we see it today where God loudly proclaims that no matter how bad our sin may be he can bring good out of it. He can resurrect the terrible and nasty parts of us and crown them with his glory so that we may be his both this day and forevermore.