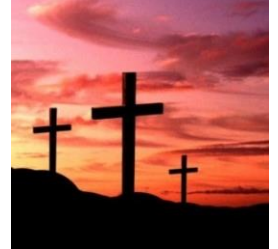


Speaking Up Boldly for Christ

We Were Not Deterred

Holy Week 2020 is now a unique memory. Never before have the world's churches been empty on Easter Sunday yet all of them conducted services. Easter is the celebration of the world's most important event. Yes, government had to make the decision to shut down public worship but it wasn't an attempt to lessen the influence of our religious beliefs. It was a necessary health decision. Franklin Graham reminded us that the Bible tells us to obey our governing authorities. (read Romans 13:1). We can still worship. And we did!



What impressed me was how determined we were to worship our Lord during this Easter season. Never before have believers been kept away from their house of worship for an extended period of time. Certainly snow storms have cancelled church services before, but never for the extended time we are now experiencing. Instead of going to a house of worship, we invited Jesus into our homes. *For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them (Matthew 18:20)*. The determination of churches to provide on-line worship has been truly outstanding. Our church asked members to record themselves on cell phones saying the Lord's Prayer during the on-line Good Friday service. The video clips were emailed to the church office and combined. On Easter Sunday we said the Lord's Prayer together in our homes and in unison with the entire congregation. Impressive, symbolic and meaningful! We could hear the voices and see on our screens the pictures of those who usually sit near us on Sunday morning. We were together in worship after all. Our family even tuned into the televised 248th consecutive Easter Sunrise service hosted by the Salem Congregation in Old Salem, North Carolina. It was something we had not done before. Nothing deterred Christians from going the extra mile to worship our Lord and Savior at Easter.

Perhaps it was God's plan for the stay-at-home order to include Holy Week during the shutdown. It gave us the opportunity to rise to the occasion in extraordinary ways to worship. Not only did we tune in on-line but many, many people shared their faith with others through social media. I have never seen so many social media posts with links to worship services as I saw Easter morning.

Do you see what is happening here? People are boldly speaking out for Jesus Christ. *He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance! (Acts 28:31)*. We don't normally do that. This is a monumental new step for us! Instead of remaining quiet, hunkered down in our homes, Christians rose up to share their faith with other "friends," especially on social media. In effect, we reached a larger audience, including the unchurched that are connected with us through social media. Franklin Graham said, "I think more people are attending online services than did when they were meeting in person." This is truly one of the good things that God has orchestrated during this worldwide crisis. *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28)*.

We must keep up the public witness, as Jesus called us to do. After the resurrection, Jesus met with the disciples before his ascension, He gave these instructions: *He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15)*. It echoes the Great Commission, when Jesus commissioned His disciples (see Matthew 28:16-20) earlier in His ministry. The Gospel of John says, *Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit (John 20:21-22)*. We have a great message to share: Christ is risen! Our confused world desperately needs Jesus, and people everywhere need the Hope through the living, resurrected Jesus Christ. Sharing convictions on Easter Sunday was fantastic. Please continue to witness.

Question: How are you sharing your faith, now and in the future?

Prayer: Dear Lord. We may be staying close to home but we can be in worship from wherever we are. We pray that we will take this opportunity to encourage others in the faith. Amen.