

April 9, 2020

Dear Friends,

I write this from my campus office on a glorious Thursday morning in the midst of an Appalachian spring. And yet, despite the beauty all around us—the dogwood, the redbud, the verbena, the returning green grass, the bird life—there is an emptiness we all feel during this particular Holy Week. The campus is eerily quiet, the silence profound and deafening. Our country and its people are suffering. The words of Psalm 22 resonate: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Sewanee is not spared. We live in self-imposed isolation from friends and neighbors. Our economy is reeling. Our frustration and sadness grow.

We do not know when it will end. But we know that eventually it will end. And that is the knowledge and the assurance imparted by Holy Week: Weeping may tarry for the night. But joy comes in the morning.

And not only by Holy Week. Last night marked the first night of Passover, when Jews around the world commemorate their liberation from Pharaoh. And for much of April Ramadan, the month when, in the Islamic tradition, “the gates of Paradise are opened and the gates of hell are locked up and devils are put in chains,” is marked by fasting and prayer.

We share, in other words, whatever our own faith tradition may be, the hope, what scripture tells us is “the evidence of things unseen,” that the scourge of an indiscriminate virus will in time be overcome. Routines, chastened perhaps by a shared experience, will resume. Gratitude for the simplest of things will abound. Respect, civility, humility—and love—will both remind us of our own human frailty and, as Benjamin Franklin once stated, make us doubt, each of us, in our own infallibility.

Until then we wait, impatiently perhaps as time passes, doing what we can to bear up under the stress we all now experience, but also drawing hope from the messages of the season: that, in the Islamic prayer, we will in time “inherit the day that is completely good;” that, in the words of a Passover blessing “every year may find us in good health;” and that, as the ancient Easter hymn proclaims, “the strife is o’er, the battle done, the victory of life is won.”

Then at last will the song of triumph begin. We will tell it out with joyful voice.

On behalf of a grieving yet grateful and resilient University, I extend Easter greetings. Students, know that you are missed and that you are loved. Faculty, know how deeply your commitment to teaching and learning in these most trying times inspires. Staff, know that your devotion to this University is valued and respected. Regents and Trustees, know that your wisdom and patience continue to exemplify leadership of the highest order. Alumni and friends, know that your support, so very generous, will carry us through to better times.

Finally, I hope you will join members of the extended family of the University in viewing a brief Easter video, [which will be available on Easter morning at this link](#). From it you will receive a message of

resurrection hope. By it you will give thanks for the great blessing given to all of us to be a part of the community of The University of the South.

Sincerely,

John M. McCardell, Jr.
Vice-Chancellor and President