



**Easter Message 2024
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and the Holy Land**

Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. Mark 16:6

Dear sisters and brothers, grace, and peace to you from the risen Jesus Christ.

These past few months have been some of the most difficult in our land and our history. We know our people are struggling, and we are struggling. Hope seems far away, and the future is unclear.

The first Easter morning was also not a time of celebration and joy. It began in darkness and doubt. Good Friday came and took the life of Jesus away with it. The hope of the people in Jesus was extinguished like the last candle in a dark room, like the last generator powering a hospital in Gaza. We can understand how the disciples were convinced that it was too late, that it was the end.

Except for the women. The women, we hear, went early to the tomb on Sunday morning. They came even though it was too late, even though it was the end, even though hope was lost, so that they could finish preparing Jesus' body. We cannot celebrate as we usually do, while



people in Gaza are suffering, but we can be steadfast (*samideen*) in this time.

The women in the Gospel were Palestinian women. On the first Easter, their *Sumud* brought them to the tomb—not to celebrate but to be steadfast. They were the first to hear the good news:

“He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said.”

They were the first to be sent out to *“Go and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead.’*” They were the first to encounter the risen Christ himself.

This year the Easter story is more important than ever. The future of the Palestinian people is uncertain. The future of Palestinian Christians is under threat. Death is all around us, and it feels final.

But the truth of Easter is that there is a greater reality than the reality we see: the reality of resurrection. Death is not the end. The tomb is not the final destination. There is something on the other side of the tomb, and there is something on the other side of this tragedy in Gaza. Resurrection exists.

Resurrection means that even when others turn away from our suffering, God will never abandon us. Resurrection becomes the source of our *Sumud* (Steadfastness), and the heart of the work of our church. In our congregations we proclaim the resurrection so that our people know the truth.



When the world says we are under occupation, Jesus says we are free.
When the world says that the people of Gaza do not matter, Jesus says they are his beloved children. When the world says that the Palestinian people have no future, Jesus says that WE are that future.

And so we are here again to proclaim the truth of resurrection: like the women at the tomb, who did not waver in *Sumud*, and like the disciples, who did waver but heard the good news anyway, because it is for all people. When we are strong in *Sumud*, let us share it with others. When we are struggling, let us not be afraid to accept help and support from others. When we are isolated, let us remember that Jesus brings us together to give us strength. And when we face death, let us remember resurrection. So may the grace and peace of the risen Jesus Christ bless you now and forever. Amen.

He has risen, He has risen indeed...