

Easter Message
from Bishop Deborah Lieder Kieseey
to the people of the
Dakotas Conference of the United Methodist Church

The year was 1989. Our family was travelling to one of our favorite vacation spots the Grand Tetons and the Yellowstone National Park. We didn't know what we were going to see before we got there because the year before two thirds of Yellowstone National Park had been devastated by wildfires. Acre upon acre of that breathtaking wilderness was just reduced to ashes. I mourned watching my favorite park go up in flames. I figured that park would never be the same.

Yet, over the year after the fire I began to hear some hopeful facts. I learned the only way a Lodgepole Pine can spread its' seeds is through fire. It takes the heat of the fire to burst open the pinecone and releases the seed. The undergrowth that was so dense was burned away. It now gave a chance for the seedlings to grow. I also learned that the ash from the fire that seemed so dead and barren to me was actually full of rich nutrients. The ash mixed with the soil it encouraged the growth and new grass thus giving a whole new food supply for the wildlife. That same ash was washed into the stream and revitalized the plant growth there, once again, allowing for new food for moose, fish and birds. The list of positives as a result of that fire was just surprising to me. I could not have imagined so many. When we got to the park I saw that the facts were really true. We could see huge portions of the forest that were now covered with green. I saw with my own eyes how out of the ashes had come new and even more abundant life.

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Now picture this scene. It was Sunday. Mary was standing at the empty tomb. She had witnessed such devastating events over the past several days. First of all there was Judas' betrayal, then the abandonment by the disciples, Peter's denial, the mockery of justice, the humiliation—the crown of thorns, now finally the cross. I can't

help but think at that moment all Jesus had stood for must have seemed dead. But just when all hope had evaporated there came an event so amazing; it must have taken all of the faith of the disciples to believe it. Mary actually met the risen Christ. From the ashes of the dreams, now came new life and new hope.

Friends how many times have we found ourselves surrounded by ashes? Dreams that have fallen to dust, loved ones no longer with us, fears, loneliness, isolation, hurts that are too deep to reveal, lives that seem empty. How many times like Mary have we found ourselves surrounded by ashes? You see the good news of Easter is that, the good news is for us. It is for those very dark times of our lives when the Easter message needs to be heard. It is for us that the resurrection story has to be told over, and over, and over again. For if we believe that there is life, even in the midst of pain and the finality of death, then surely we must believe that there is life underneath all of the other ashes of our lives as well.

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You see we have come full circle this lent. We began this season with ashes and now today out of those ashes we celebrate the miracle of new life. So with that hope let us truly rejoice today. Let us say with joy in our hearts that Christ has risen! Christ has risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen!

