

## ***Being Easter People in a Good Friday World***

Luke 24:1-12

Isaiah 65:17-25

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Once there was this guy, and he was driving in his car, and all of a sudden, he saw the Easter Bunny hopping on the road. Well, the guy was going too fast, and he didn't hit the brakes in time, so he hit the Easter Bunny.

The man was really upset, and was thinking, "Oh no, what about all those poor little kids?? What can I do!?"

At that moment, a young lady drove up in her car, and asked, "What's wrong?"

"I hit the Easter Bunny!!" said the guy.

"Oh, I know what to do," said the young lady, and she went into her car, got a can, and sprayed the Easter Bunny with its contents.

Almost immediately, the Easter Bunny got up, hopped a little bit, turned around and waved, hopped a little, turned around and waved, and it kept doing that—hopping and waving, hopping and waving... When the Easter Bunny was out of sight, the guy turned to the young lady and asked, "Wow, I'm dying to know what was in that can!!"

"Oh," said the young lady, "It was hair spray. It says, 'Spray on dead hair for permanent wave.'"

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And a Happy Easter to you. I am glad to know that the Easter Bunny is alive and well, and by now has made most of its stops in Georgetown!

But you and I know that we're not here today because of a miraculous resuscitation of the Easter Bunny. You and I know that we're here today because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. In just a week's time we have accompanied Jesus into Jerusalem where he entered as a king; we have spent the evening with him in the Upper Room, where he shared his last meal with his disciples; and on Friday we put him on the cross and then laid him in the tomb.

And so here we are on Sunday, the third day. Luke tells us that at deep, dark dawn, at that hour just before the sun came up on the horizon, the women who had witnessed Jesus' death and who had seen him placed in the tomb returned to the place where Jesus was buried, so they could anoint his body with spices.

They were expecting to find the corpse of Jesus in the tomb.

Instead, they were surprised to find the stone rolled away, and the tomb empty. Had someone come and taken the body? Was this the cruel deed of grave robbers or malicious vandals who wanted to pour salt on the wounds of the grieving? Suddenly there appeared two men in brilliant clothing who addressed the women: "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!"

Why do you look for the living among the dead?

But the women weren't looking for a living Jesus. They were looking for a dead Jesus, whom they could anoint with burial spices. They came to the tomb expecting death. But the messengers told the women that they wouldn't find death, but life. He has risen!

And so the story of Jesus doesn't end on the cross after all. The story is not over when his body is laid into the tomb and the stone rolled across the entrance. No, my friends, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is God's declaration that Good Friday isn't the ultimate reality, that there is a power greater than the sin and evil of our world—that by the power of the resurrection of Jesus, God has won his victory.

Easter is God's answer to the world's Good Fridays. Good Friday is no longer the governing reality of our world—Easter is the ultimate reality. It is Easter that promises us that death is not the final word for God's people. It is Easter that enables me to preach comfort and hope with integrity of faith every time we hold a memorial service. It is Easter that gives us the promise of everlasting life.

But the Easter promise is more than just waiting for life in the hereafter. It is Easter that promises us that there is nothing in all of creation that can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. It is Easter that proclaims that love and grace and compassion and mercy and forgiveness have prevailed over law and sin and enmity and hatred and death. It is Easter that assures us that Jesus has not left us, but he is with us always.

I wonder, though, how do we live? Do we live our lives based on the new reality of the risen Lord, or are we stuck in a Good Friday world? I suspect that you and I are a bit like the women on that first Easter morning. It is our tendency to believe the preaching of a world that says life stops with Good Friday. It is easy to fall into the trap of those that believe that all there is for us is to live whatever years have been randomly allotted to us, and then to die; and if we're really lucky, we can die an easy and natural death rather than a tragic, or painful, or violent death.

Yet I can't help but be haunted by the question—why do you look for the living among the dead? Why are we who profess faith in God willing to settle for a Good Friday world? Christ has risen! Good Friday has been turned on its head!

Don't you see—the empty tomb is not a symbol of hopelessness and despair; rather, it is the promise that the love of God is more powerful than death, greater than the darkness that surrounds us, bigger than anything anyone can throw at us.

And it is the challenge of the empty tomb for us to live as Easter people in a Good Friday world.

That's the choice the empty tomb gives to us. Are we going to keep on looking for the living among the dead? Are we going to continue in life expecting death wherever we go? Are we going to buy into the lie that God rules in heaven, but the devil is in control here on earth? What kind of people are you and I going to be? Are we going to be Good Friday people who believe that this is all there is—occasional glimpses of glory in an otherwise dreary and dangerous world? Or are we going to be Easter people who refuse to settle for what Good Friday leaves us with?

The vision of the 65<sup>th</sup> chapter of Isaiah is of a time when the status quo will be overturned. It is a vision of a time when renters will not be enslaved to greedy landlords, when farmers will not have to sweat and toil over their land only to have others come and take away the fruits of their labor, when children aren't born into a hopeless existence, when predator and prey will sit together at the same table. The Good Friday lie says that we can never have a world like that. But Easter people will live with confidence and assurance

that the power of the love of God is greater than the power of injustice and oppression and unrighteousness. Easter people refuse to accept the answer that the way things are is the way they have to be, for we know that there is a living Lord who calls us and empowers us to live into the vision of the new heaven and new earth that is the kingdom of God.

In Guatemala there are some native Mayan women who won't name their children until the children are three years old. The threats to some of the Amerindians by the death squads and the feudal landlords make life so uncertain that the women protect themselves from getting too attached to their children until they are reasonably certain their children can survive in this world.<sup>1</sup>

And it's easy to understand their position. After all, many will ask, Why even bring children into a world such as ours? But if we are Easter people, then we won't settle for the answer the Good Friday world gives us; instead we will work toward a world where children are not born into calamity, to borrow from Isaiah. You see, the resurrection is the Lord's announcement to us that we need not let the lifespan of Guatemalan children be dictated by the right-wing death squads. In Christ, through Christ, with Christ, we can—we must—expect something better for the children of Guatemala and all children of the world.

My friends, it is when the people of God live as Easter people that we transform the world in which we live. You can see Easter in the woman who patiently guides her husband through the twisted journey of Alzheimer's, loving him with the compassion and love of Christ flowing through her. You can see Easter in the people who still go to New Orleans to help rebuild from the destruction of Katrina, because they know the justice of Christ demands that we care for the poor. You can see Easter in doctors who spend their retirement traveling to nations with lesser resources, because they can offer doctors and patients something that will improve the quality of their lives. You can see Easter in the cancer patient who is already making plans for Christmas, because she expects to be with her family. You can see Easter in our teachers who are determined to help young boys and girls out of the cycle of hopelessness. You can see Easter in ordinary men and women who "will not settle for war and injustice and little children starving and AIDS but who pray for and work for and give themselves for God's kingdom."<sup>2</sup>

And so the question to you and to me as we draw near the tomb where Jesus was laid: Will we continue to buy into the despair of Good Friday, or will we live as Easter people?

Harry Emerson Fosdick was the founding pastor of the Riverside Church near Harlem, New York. He was a very progressive pastor, passionate about serving the down and out. In 1930, Fosdick wrote the hymn "God of Grace and God of Glory." The hymn is a prayer for God's strength and courage "for the facing of this hour." In the last verse is this prayer: "Save us from weak resignation to the evils we deplore; let the gift of thy salvation be our glory evermore. Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, serving thee whom we adore, serving thee whom we adore."<sup>3</sup>

My friends in Christ, it is the prayer of Easter people who live in a Good Friday world, for God to "save us from weak resignation to the evils we deplore." As Easter people we do not settle for the answers that Good Friday provides. Instead, we live in the confidence that there is nothing to fear, no darkness so

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<sup>1</sup> Carlos Cardoza-Orlandi, in David Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds., *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 2* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), p. 356.

<sup>2</sup> John Buchanan, "A Task Waiting... Music to Be Performed," April 8, 2007, [www.fourthchurch.org](http://www.fourthchurch.org)

<sup>3</sup> Harry Emerson Fosdick, *God of Grace and God of Glory*, Presbyterian Hymnal, #420.

dark, no threat so dire, no death so deadly<sup>4</sup> that we will not seek to live into the vision of the new heaven and the new earth.

It is a Good Friday world we live in.

But you and I are Easter people, aren't we?

Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> Buchanan, from sermon noted above