

*I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified.
He is not here, but has been raised.*

This is the angel's announcement to the women at Jesus' tomb on the morning of his resurrection. At our recent Easter celebrations, Christians around the world recalled these blessed words and rejoiced in the life-giving hope that Jesus lives: He is not here in this place of death, but has been raised from death to life. Come and see. You won't find him here. He lives and he goes ahead of you as the God of life!

It is such a powerful story and profound announcement, and I wonder if we fully appreciate how defiant a testimony it is.

We celebrate Easter in the church as the day Jesus was raised. We give thanks that God would do such a thing, we praise God for the power of the Holy Spirit and the magnitude of God's love, and we go on with life, refreshed by the celebration and renewed in faith. It's a good thing. But do we fully appreciate what it means to boldly claim that Jesus lives and goes ahead of us as the God of life? Do we fully appreciate how defiant such a claim is to the shared life we embody as humanity?

In Jesus' rising, the power of life conquers the power of death. That is not simply a promise of personal spiritual salvation and confirmation of one's ticket to heaven. It is God's way of revealing a new reality...a reality of life and love rising victorious over the reality of death and fear. For the believer, there is (of course) a deeply personal assurance in this amazing grace, but there is also an invitation - even a command! - to live in and by this new reality, even (and especially) while surrounded by forces of fear and death.

Just in the days surrounding our Easter celebration, our military dropped the largest non-nuclear bomb ever used in combat. An insane schedule of executions was ordered (and defended) by a state in our union. Mass incarceration, deportations, and legislative violence against vulnerable populations strike terror into the hearts of millions among us. Creation itself is harmed by our violence of environmental abuse. And that is only this month in this country. We live in a world forever

shaped and ruled by violence and death. And most of us believe it to be entirely necessary.

As Easter people, Christians claim that God's ways of life and love are greater than those of fear and death. Yet we seem so easily resigned, don't we? "We must engage the violent with violence," we say. "We must defend ourselves and our interests." "We must meet strength with strength and keep things as they are before we fall down that slippery slope." "We may not like it, but it is what it is." I know many faithful people who think this way. I find myself thinking this way at times.

But we recall on Easter that Jesus isn't found in the places of death. He isn't there, stuck in the tombs of our making. He isn't there, resigned to the forces of death and fear winning the day - or being the necessary mode of our survival. No. He lives and he goes ahead of us as the God of life. He meets violence and death with love and mercy, and he rises from death to stand in triumph over all things that destroy, demean, and dishonor the life of all creation. He lives, and his risen life becomes our proclamation that love wins. Mercy wins. All that Jesus embodies - his hope and blessing to the vulnerable, his refusal to meet violence with violence - becomes our assurance. It becomes our invitation and command. It becomes a testament of defiance to the way we are so easily resigned to be.

Jesus lives to show us that we can trust the way of love and mercy. We can trust the ways of Jesus' witness to justice and joy for all creation. So why do we settle for a shared human life so ordered by violence and fear? Why do we go on living resigned to the tragic notion that violence and fear are the only currency for power or survival?

A simple answer would be to call it original sin or something like it. But I would rather we answer with another question: What if we dared to believe what we claim to believe? What if we who trust in Christ's rising dared to trust in what his rising means to our confrontation with the forces of death and fear? What if we lived not only by the assurance of his grace, but by the defiant proclamation that love and mercy are forever more powerful than all forces that destroy, demean, and dishonor God's creation? What if we as believers dared

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to be Easter People, living by the defiant promise of resurrection?

For me, there is hope in even asking those questions. Imagine the hope we might enjoy and give this world if we dared to live the answers. What if?