

ISAIAH 65:17-25

- ¹⁷ For I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered
or come to mind.
- ¹⁸ But be glad and rejoice forever
in what I am creating;
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy,
and its people as a delight.
- ¹⁹ I will rejoice in Jerusalem,
and delight in my people;
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it,
or the cry of distress.
- ²⁰ No more shall there be in it
an infant that lives but a few days,
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;
for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,
and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.
- ²¹ They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
- ²² They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat;
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.
- ²³ They shall not labor in vain,
or bear children for calamity;
for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord —
and their descendants as well.
- ²⁴ Before they call I will answer,
while they are yet speaking I will hear.
- ²⁵ The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
but the serpent — its food shall be dust!
They shall not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain,
says the Lord.

JOHN 20:1-18

¹Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ²So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to

them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." ³Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. ⁴The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.¹⁰Then the disciples returned to their homes.

¹¹But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; ¹²and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet.¹³They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." ¹⁴When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." ¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). ¹⁷Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" ¹⁸Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

SERMON

Easter is a season for new life. It's spring, of course, so there are eggs in nests and buds on the trees, and little yellow and purple crocuses popping up through the dark soil. You go into stores and everywhere there are signs and symbols of new life: brightly colored eggs to be filled with candy, pictures of tiny, fuzzy chicks, bunny rabbits known for their giant front teeth and excessive fertility. New life! Pastel colors! Easter!

And that is so often the singular message we get at Easter time: Easter is all about new life. And new life is wonderful, I mean, in the past six years I've given birth to three tiny, perfect humans. I love

the fuzzy new baby heads and tiny fingers and toes and I don't even mind the diapers that much. I love new life, and there's something profound and beautiful about new life...be it flowers or babies or bunnies. New life isn't the problem. The problem is, new life is not what Easter is all about. Easter is not a season for bunnies and chicks and eggs and babies, we've gotten that all wrong. Although, I'll totally admit, I'm going home this afternoon to set up an egg hunt for my kids, and I love the egg hunt here. There's nothing wrong with new life...but that's just not Easter.

Properly speaking, Easter is not the holiday for new life. Honestly, that's more of a Christmas thing on the Christian calendar. Or maybe Pentecost, as that's the birthday of the church. Easter isn't about new life. Easter is about resurrected life. And there's a huge, major difference between new life and resurrected life. Because new life, it springs from nothing. It wasn't there before, and now it is. It's, by definition new.

Resurrected life, well, that's complicated, right? Because resurrection implies that at one point, before the life was brought back, there must have been death. There must have been loss. The life was, and then it wasn't, and now it is again. Easter, it's the day of resurrection, not the day of birth. Easter starts out at the graveside, not the labor and delivery ward or manger. Easter, by it's very nature, it's rooted in the soil of death, loss, grief. I totally get why Target is full of bunnies and chicks and eggs. It's 100% easier to sell us on the idea of new things, new life, birth, babies, candy, and fun! I just don't quite see the ad copy being quite as cheerful if it had a photo of Lazarus coming out, wrapped up in his linens, still stinking from being in the tomb four days. Or, even more potent: Jesus

standing by the garden tomb, raw, red wounds in his hands, his feet, his side. Zombies aren't really de rigueur for Easter, you know?

Easter, in order to understand it, we have to first be willing to face loss and death and tremendous sadness. Because only in experiencing loss can we be fully present in the gift and miracle of the resurrection. Of Jesus being brought back to life, of our own loved ones and friends finding unexpected life after death in the presence of God, of the promise to each of us that death will not have the last word, but that love will always win out.

It feels a bit macabre when we see a tiny baby up here, so we don't talk about it too much, but baptism is, in fact, a sacrament tied equally to both death and to life. When we enter into those waters, part of the promise we are making is to follow Christ into a death like his. At a funeral service we put out white paraments, as a reminder of baptism, a way to see that we will die, we will follow Christ into death. But, the hope of Easter, the reason we celebrate, is that for us, we believe that death is not the end. We follow Christ into a death like his, so that we too might follow him into the resurrection and unexpected life promised by God. Our hope is born of a triumph over our loss.

And this message of Easter, that it is about resurrected life, not new life. Quite frankly, this is a message that the world needs to hear. We have enough new life, and that's wonderful. But so much of what we experience, especially as adults, involves great grief, trauma, and loss. And not just within the closeness of our own families. The world around us is full of grief. And as Christians, this Easter hope: that life can be brought out of death, that God's love is

more powerful than the hatred carried in death...that's something the world needs to know.

When I look around, I wonder and I pray:

- For our country, in the midst of a mean spirited, hateful, dismal, rude, childish election cycle...I pray, Come Lord Jesus! Resurrect our hope! Bring us life and love, because all we seem to be serving up is hatred and death.
- For the people in Belgium, in Libya, in Yemen, in Indonesia, in Turkey, in Egypt, and in all the other places who have experienced terrorizing events of violence in this past month, I pray, Come Lord Jesus! Resurrect our hope! Bring us life and love and forgiveness, because all around us we see destruction and death and hate.
- For the thoughts of my own heart, when I am angry and mean and lack generosity and kindness...I pray, Come Lord Jesus! Resurrect our hope! Bring me life and love and compassion, because my heart is dark and mean and twisted by selfishness.
- For my brothers and sisters all around this world, people who experience threats and real violence at the hands of others, because someone doesn't like the person they choose to love, or the color of their skin, or the God they worship, or the clothes they wear, or the job they chose, or the political party they affiliate with, or whatever the case may be...I pray, Come Lord Jesus! Resurrect our hope! Bring us life and love, because we're just too good at tearing each other down, at bringing death and hatred for any perceived slight.

We live in a world, a community, a church, even within our own hearts and minds, we live in a place that is always going to be full of loss and death. And so we need Easter. We need real Easter. Not just the eggs and chicks and flowers. We need the Resurrection Power Easter. The hope that life can spring out of death. The hope that love will conquer hate. The promise that goodness is stronger than evil. The assurance that our God will have the last word, and that word will always be YES. Yes to life, yes to love, yes to grace and compassion and kindness and humility and gentleness and friendship and redemption and resurrection. YES. That will be the final word, no matter what death may come, Our God will have the final say, and it will be YES. Thanks be to God! Amen and Amen!