

FROM THE INTERIM SENIOR PASTOR

During the dozen years that I served as the bishop of the Southeastern Synod, I was rarely home in Franklin for more than a few days at a time. That meant that during the times of year when the seasons were changing I experienced the change in spurts. I might leave home when the trees were bare and return home a week later to see the fringe magnolia in our yard covered in white blossoms and the first spring green emerging from the bulbs planted in the garden.

This year is the second that I have been home throughout the change of seasons, so I have had time to experience the slow but steady re-emergence of life that happens here in Franklin every spring. Of course if you have been to church on Easter, you've heard a preacher or two make the comparison of resurrection to the life that emerges from the seemingly dead trees and shrubs every year about this time. But there is more going on in Jesus' resurrection.

I was reminded of the "more" in a challenging op-ed by Esau McCaulley in Good Friday's New York Times. (Here's the link:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/02/opinion/easter-celebration.html>.)

McCaulley writes about "the two Easters that struggle alongside each other." One, he says "is linked closely to the celebration of spring and the possibility of new beginnings.... The other deals with the disturbing prospect that God is present with us. His power breaks out and unsettles the world."

This year the gospel readings in our Revised Common Lectionary have come mostly from Mark. In his account of the first Easter morning, Mark records three women going to the tomb in the early morning to anoint the body of their friend Jesus. You know the story: They are wondering how they will get into the tomb and are surprised to see that the stone covering has already been removed. Inside, a young man tells them that Jesus is risen and that he has gone ahead of them to Galilee. The young man instructs the women to go and tell the disciples to meet him there.

But here is where Mark's story of the resurrection ends: "So [the women] went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." A very odd place to end a gospel.

But McCaulley points out, "Mark's ending points to a truth that often gets lost in the celebration: Easter is a frightening prospect. For the women, the only thing more terrifying than a world with Jesus dead was one in which he is alive.

“We know what to do with grief and despair. We have a place for it. We have rituals that surround it.... Hope is much harder to come by. The women did not go to the tomb looking for hope. They were searching for a place to grieve. They wanted to be left alone in despair. The terrifying prospect of Easter is that God called these women to return to the same world that crucified Jesus with a very dangerous gift: hope in the power of God, the unending reservoir of forgiveness and an abundance of love. It would make them seem like fools.”

That hope and that power are what we celebrate at Easter. And rightly understood, it is a frightening prospect, that Jesus is not safely sitting up in heaven beatifically smiling down on us but instead is here in the world, this world, still concerned for the poor and mistreated, still demanding mercy and justice, still looking with compassion on those who suffer from illness or at the hands of the powerful, and still calling us to join him in the kingdom work of transformation.

For weeks now walking in the neighborhood, working in the garden, I’ve been thinking, “Spring is coming.” Then, one day recently, I noticed, not because of the calendar, but because of the color all around, spring isn’t *coming*, spring is *here*. Not completely. The oak in my backyard is still bare, some nights are still frosty, but clearly, winter is over.

Like the spring that has already arrived while I am still waiting for it, the Risen One is not only coming, he is here in the world now, waiting for all of us who dare to believe in his resurrection to join him in the hard work of mercy and compassion, justice and peace.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

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