

April fools

By Elizabeth A. Eaton



It all started with such promise: The angel announcing to Mary that the child she would bear would be called Son of the Most High; Mary's conviction that this child was the embodiment of God's promised justice, that the powerful would be brought

down from their thrones and the lowly lifted up, that the hungry would be filled with good things and the rich sent away empty; angels announcing his birth; Simeon and Anna declaring the fulfillment of God's promise in the tiny child; the youth teaching in the temple; thousands being fed; the sick healed; the dead raised; wind and waves stilled; teaching with authority.

And his teaching! The kingdom of heaven has drawn near. Blessed are the poor, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst. God so loved the world that he gave his only son. We are no longer servants in the household, but children. Sin and its consequence, death, no longer have power. Love is stronger than hate. And all of this comes from the merciful and gracious will of God as a gift.


Could this be true? Was the world being turned upside down? Was this the start of the revolution? No wonder the crowds shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" when he rode into Jerusalem. Perhaps the disciple Nathaniel remembered Jesus' words when they first met: "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man" (John 1:51).

And then, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" It was over. The world hadn't changed. Might still made right. How ridiculously naïve to believe that any reversal of the old order could come about. Hope is for the gullible. Looking at this broken man hanging utterly helpless, naked and broken on a cross, the powers and principalities, earthly and spiritual, death and the devil must have said, "You fool."

This, as Paul reminds us, is the wisdom of the world. And the world can present plenty of hard evidence that it is right: children killing children in horrific school shootings; human beings living underground to escape bombing and chemical weapons in Syria; children afraid to play outdoors in my city of Chicago because they could be shot; sexual violence; claims of supremacy; and 60 million displaced people—all of this supported by our rebellion against God, our idolatrous claim that we are in control and the world is ours. In the face of this and all of the suffering others cause and we cause others, we, too, might cry out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Psalm 22:1).

I believe that the beginning of Psalm 22 expresses the anguish of the psalmist and the anguish of our Lord, but there is more going on here. Citing the first words of a text was, in the tradition of the time, a way of identifying an entire passage. The psalm ends this way: "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him. . . . Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord, and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it."

This is the wisdom of God. Jesus' crucifixion is the death of our death. His innocent suffering has reconciled all of creation to God. He has done it. We stake our lives on this.

This year Easter falls on April 1. We shall have come through the Lenten desert to the Easter garden. We shall say, "Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia." And we shall confess this and live this in the face of worldly wisdom that is based on death. Life wins. Love wins. And if the world wants to call us April fools, we are glad to claim that title. 

A monthly message from the presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Her email address: bishop@elca.org.