

Easter Day
St. Paul's/Resurrección, Mount Vernon, WA

April 17, 2022
Rev. Paul Moore

Dawn

I just celebrated a birthday few weeks back, and you all shared it with me by indulging in pie. I'm sure you all were much more disciplined than I, but for me it was something of a binge. I won't eat that much pie in one day again until next year's birthday. My lovely wife, on the other hand, has a way of counting birthdays that is not the norm in this society. Since numbers never have really interested her much, she rounds to the nearest five in the decade; so she was 50 for 5 years, and then 55 for five years...you get the idea. If you press her for a year, she doesn't say she is "so many" years old. She thinks of herself as living in her such and such year. The very important and vital fact that I am actually six months OLDER than she and therefore her elder, means nothing at all. I say I am 65, and she says she is in her 65th year. It's all the same to her. But her way of approaching things reveals something interesting. For her, a birthday is not a stake in the ground that marks where you have come, but an invitation to look back across her life and forward into the future to see where she is going.

Maybe Easter should be like that. More than one day, or even one 7-week season. Maybe it's like a doorway through which to look both directions. Take Mary this morning in the Gospel lesson. Of all the Easter morning stories in the Bible, this is my favorite. It's just so personal. Mary, the one whose brother Jesus had raised to life again after he had died, the one who poured an insane amount of perfume on his feet and wiped them with her hair, the one who loved much because much had been forgiven much, The one who chose the better part of sitting at Jesus' feet in spite of the expectations of her sister in the kitchen, one of the women who had stood at the foot of the cross with Mary, Jesus' mother, and born witness to his death and the place of his burial, this is the Mary who cannot keep away from the tomb, and comes to finish the embalming process she began with the perfume-on-the-feet thing. She loves him with every fiber of her being.

Friday was bad enough, but now she finds herself in one of those nightmares where you can never get where you need to go. Jesus' tomb has been violated and his body is gone. It's rock bottom. There is no deeper she can sink. This is the view backward through the door of Easter. It takes a full and honest inventory of the wreckage of our lives. It leans into the brokenness we all know.

- It is the reports of war crimes committed in Ukraine.
- It is the death of George Floyd and countless others.
- It is the horror being uncovered at the residential Indian schools.
- It is split families as some are deported and some remain.
- It is the families of thousands in unmarked graves in the deserts of northern Mexico.
- It is the holocausts in Germany, Ruanda, Sudan, El Salvador, and across the face of the Native American population of this hemisphere.

- It is the memories you carry of your greatest pain, blackest evil, worst degradation.

It's your and our rock-bottom, where we can sink no deeper.

At that moment, Jesus is there in the middle of the cemetery. Unable to see through her tears of her past, unable to conceive that perhaps Easter is a door forward as well as backward, she thinks he is but the gardener, going about his duties. But maybe he knows something. Maybe he did something, and so she asks. Her question is our question. If you have taken him away, where have you laid him?

- For the Ukrainian mother of a war-dead child, "Soldier, where have you taken God?"
- Family of dead black people ask, "Police, where have you put God?"
- The parents of children in residential schools ask, "Christians, where have you put God?"
- The families of people disappeared, "Where have you buried God?"
- Survivors around the world ask, "Where is God?"
- You in your darkest hour, "Where is God?"

But Jesus IS there, in the cemetery, alive and well.

- The West is gathering around Ukraine, doing what each country finds it can and is willing to do, creating a level of unity across the European Union unknown in its history.
- Our country is on the road to the most profound racial reckoning it has ever faced.
- Residential schools are seeking forgiveness and offering reparations.
- The Anglican Bishop of Western Mexico gathers regularly with Roman Catholic clergy and a host of volunteers, searching for graves in the desert.

Victor Frankl, Nazi concentration camps survivor, found that no matter what happened, there was a place within that could always choose, and there was always an option for life. It was put one way to me by a dear friend, "When I was ready to let go of my faith, my faith wouldn't let go of me." Easter happens when we recognize God in the midst of the brokenness of life. It looks back into the darkness of death, and then turns around and finds Jesus, alive, in the middle of the cemetery.

I tell this story with permission. If you haven't met Paul Fuentes yet, you need to. Fuentes experienced a Good Friday. His story before being locked up will be his to tell as he sees fit, but I want to start at this point. Locked away, labeled a felon, isolated and made a pawn of our prison system. But he experienced an Easter in prison. He realized that the way he was living had something to do with where he was. He realized he had been "a knucklehead," and sought out the help of God and his Bible to turn a corner. Dawn gathered on the eastern sky.

Then he met Chris Hoke, and Chris Hoke met us, and we began to write to Paul, in anticipation of another Easter. Slowly, the relationship began to form, as dawn gathered in the eastern sky. Slowly the calendar turned, and his release date got closer and closer. We began to see streaks of pink and purple in the east. (That Holy Saturday was a LONG WAIT !) Then Carol Boss, Tom Worrell and I drove down on March 16th. We

met his father and his brother, and the five of us welcomed Paul out of prison. The stone had rolled away, and we all stood there in the bright light of morning, blinking in wonder and amazement.

Since then, there have been more Easters. He got his driver's license, the first he has ever had. He is working on a place to live, and profitable, meaningful employment. Each of these is a little Good Friday, carrying the threat of being pushed back into the tomb. But each also conceals an Easter, as stone after stone rolls away. Each time there is night, dawn breaks in the eastern sky to reveal Jesus, there in the middle of the cemetery.

As Easter is in the Spring, when life springs renewed from the earth, so, the cycle of Good Friday to Easter repeats itself over and over again, in our lives, in our society, in the world and even in the created order. It all shouts that though death comes, life is the final word. The light of Easter will always pierce the darkness of Friday—always, every time, because Jesus is here, alive and well in the middle of our cemeteries.