



Dear Friends,

Many crises have been and are continuing to plague humanity: the war in Ukraine, the terrorist attacks committed by Hamas, ISIS the unspeakable suffering and horrendous loss of life among innocent Palestinians; conflict in Haiti and hunger in Sudan; and the health crisis and rise in homelessness in our own land. The litany of crises grows longer every day, the greatest one being the crisis of the human spirit.

As we look around ourselves, it is abundantly clear that you and I live in a Good Friday world -- a world full of suffering, unfairness, trouble, war, violence, poverty, oppression, tragic mistakes, hurts, losses, and grief. Good Friday is the day we Christians commemorate Christ's suffering and death on the cross, but in many ways Christ's suffering and death continue to colour our entire universe.

We live in a Good Friday world. This is our reality.

But – and this is a BIG BUT – WE ARE AN EASTER PEOPLE. It's true. We do live in a Good Friday world. But too often we are tempted to leave things there, not realizing the hope of resurrection. The story did not stop on Friday. We need to read the scriptures all the way through to Easter Sunday. The hope of this season is all about that Sunday.

The popular Christian writer Tony Campolo once wrote about a life changing sermon he heard in his book, *It's Friday, But Sunday is Coming*. Campolo writes about hearing a wise African American pastor preach about the events of Easter week<sup>1</sup> *For an hour and a half he*

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<sup>1</sup>Antony Campola, *It's Friday, But Sunday's Comin'*, 2002.

*preached one line over and over again... "It's Friday, but Sunday's comin'!" He started his sermon real softly by saying, "It was Friday; it was Friday and my Jesus was dead on the tree. But that was Friday, and Sunday's comin'!"*

As he described the events of that terrible day, the preacher gradually got louder and louder. The congregation got more and more excited, until finally, the preacher reached the end of his message, and the people could not contain themselves any longer. He shouted at the top of his lungs, "*it's Friday*", and then the whole congregation stood up and yelled back with one accord, "*Sunday's comin'!*"

After the crucifixion of Jesus on the Friday, it was impossible for his disciples to imagine that Sunday was coming, so overwrought were they by guilt and despair. How could they ever again experience the Good News that they had known when Jesus was alive and walked among them? Nothing would ever be the same. The future was bleak indeed. Their beloved friend and Messiah had died a most cruel death.

What's worse – far worse – is the fact that the disciples had behaved most despicably and disappointed Jesus most horribly. Judas had betrayed Jesus and committed suicide. Peter had denied him and wept tears of shame. At the time of his arrest, they all forsook him and fled. So the picture we have of the disciples after the crucifixion is of individuals demoralized and despairing, huddled behind locked doors in near panic. Those are not the people who could conceivably go out with great courage to tell the world, that Jesus of Nazareth who had been crucified, had risen from the dead, was alive, and now vindicated by God.

Many people tell me that they have a hard time with the resurrection. They are not alone! It was definitely the last thing on the minds of those early disciples. Indeed, the first response of the disciples to the news of the resurrection was one of overwhelming disbelief. I know I myself have had times when I have wondered if the resurrection were true. But as theologian William C. Placher has argued, "if Jesus died condemned as a blasphemer and troublemaker for the religious authorities, then all his big claims, including that he spoke for God with unique authority, would be

false.”<sup>2</sup> I agree. Personally, I can see no reason to be Christian if Jesus’ resurrection was just a made-up story.

Placher goes on to say: “Certainly if death were the end of Jesus, then he could not offer hope beyond death for anyone else.”<sup>3</sup> He observes that many of us in the western world might say, well, that’s all right. I have had a good life. But then he invites us to think of the countless people who live in extreme poverty, whose lives are cut horribly short, the children who have never grown to adulthood because of disease and malnutrition and war. What about the people who languish in secret prison cells, enduring constant humiliation and torture? What about those born with painful and incurable disabilities? If God is truly a loving God, then the justice of God demands that there be something more than this life which, while very pleasant for many of us, has been a living hell for most of the world’s inhabitants.

Ultimately, of course, whatever you decide about the resurrection, it is important to ask yourself what it means to you and how you are invited to live life differently because of it. At the end of the Second World War, on the Sunday after VE Day, Field Marshal Montgomery addressed his troops, first by offering thanks to God for the allies’ victory. But then he went on to talk about the huge sacrifices that had been made for the sake of victory and the tremendous loss of life and incredible suffering that had been endured on both sides. Here is what he said: *“Remember that victory gives us an opportunity – an opportunity for a fuller and better life – it is no guarantee that the opportunity will be grasped. That depends on us.”* For us who have been called to be co-creators with God in the building up of God’s Kingdom (or Kin-dom), there can be no greater challenge, no finer opportunity, and no better response to the resurrection than to serve the Lord here and now.

Let’s return to the Easter gospel. If the story of the resurrection were not true, would the life of Jesus of Nazareth, who died in a particularly shameful and scandalous fashion, have had the power to transform his frightened and defeated followers into courageous, faith-filled disciples who

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<sup>2</sup>William C. Placher, *Jesus the Savior. The Meaning of Jesus Christ for Christian Faith*. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville. 2001, p. 165.

<sup>3</sup>William C. Placher, pp. 159-160..

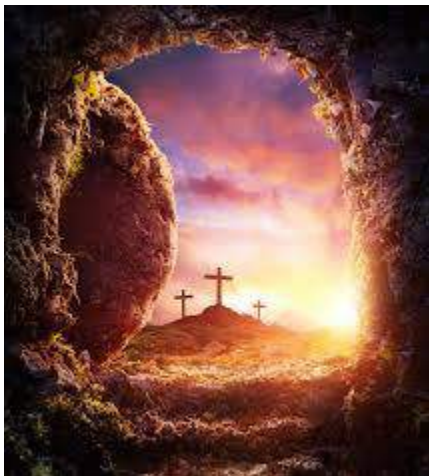
then went out and risked their very lives for his sake? I believe that there is only one reason for this amazing transformation and that is that the story of the resurrection is true.

Now I can't explain the resurrection to you. That's like explaining the sun in terms of a candle. It's the sun that makes sense of the candle, not the other way around. Moreover, at the end of the day, as the great preacher David Steel once said, *"the joy of Easter is the 'fact' of the resurrection, not facts about the resurrection."*<sup>4</sup>

So, like Saint Paul, I am putting all my eggs into one Easter basket. As Paul wrote to the Christians at Corinth, *"If Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain, and your faith has been in vain.... If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied."* (First Corinthians 15: 14,19) But if Christ was raised from the dead, then neither death nor any of the crises facing humanity then or now, can have the last word. For while we may live in a Good Friday world, we are an Easter people, and we know that Sunday is coming!

Happy Easter, friends.

Blessings,  
Sheila




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<sup>4</sup>David Steel, *Preaching Through the Year*. John Knox Press. Atlanta. 1973.