



Messages of Easter hope from local pastors

Spring brings new life

I truly love spring, this year just a bit more than usual as the month and a half of winter was a bit brutal. We saw many of our neighbors and friends suffer through the loss of many of their calves due to the snow and cold, searching for and having to buy more hay as the cold weather lasted well into March. Blessed by all the snow and rain we are now seeing flooding in some areas and some farm work not getting done.

But alas, spring is here. The deer and elk are moving back to the high country as the snow disappears and the grass is turning green. The winter wheat is growing and the ground around our communities is turning green. Because of the moisture, spring wheat and barley are being planted with expectation's high as there is plenty of moisture in the ground.

We get to hear lawnmowers running, softball and baseball games being played and the golf course is seeing a lot more use. Just around the corner will be graduations and the end of the school year.

Living the Alleluia

Every Sunday is a celebration of the resurrection – a “little Easter.” But during the quieter, more reflective season of Lent many Christians set aside the “alleluias” to mark those 40 days as a time to prepare themselves for what’s coming. During Lent, there is a deliberate effort to re-examine our lives, clear out the wreckage, make amends and turn back toward God more whole-heartedly. That kind of disciplined preparation makes the good news of Jesus’ resurrection even more startling, powerful and welcome. It reminds us that we need fixing and can’t fix ourselves. It gives us time to notice how dependent we are on the compassionate and unconditional love of God, on display most vividly in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. And then, when we reintroduce the alleluias on Easter morning, it’s with a joyful eruption of praise, invigorated by a renewed awareness that we have been rescued from the consequences of sin. We have been set free and saved by grace, that unearned gift.

In the garden, at the empty tomb, in the upper room, on the road to Emmaus and Damascus, Mary, Peter, John, Thomas, Paul and countless others experienced the unexpected and unexplainable: that God is stronger than death; that Jesus lives. But the Easter story isn’t just a slice of history---something that happened long ago and far away. It’s a mystery that is still unfolding in our lifetimes as God’s Spirit works in us, in the world around us, and among the faithful people God has placed in our lives. The resurrected Jesus is still breaking into the present through his Spirit and through followers who live what could be called an “alleluia life” – a life that’s filled with praise and reflects God’s love for all of creation . . . a life that can lead believers and skeptics alike to realize that the

However, we cannot look past Easter. It is at Easter that we can focus completely on the events that spring brings to us – New Life. It is at Easter, that just as the trees bud and leaf out that we are reminded that from the grave came life. It is at Easter; we once again are blessed to be reminded that the one who created us was and is willing to do everything possible to redeem us. It is at Easter; we are reminded that just as the earth comes to life in the spring that we too through Christ are given new life.

I want to encourage you to embrace spring and the beauty of the world in which we are privileged to live. But most importantly I want to encourage you to embrace the one who gave his life so that you may have new life.

If you do not have a church that you call home, we invite you to come and join us at 10:45 this Easter morning as we celebrate the one who gives us life.

Ray DeLoe
Heppner Christian Church

mystery of resurrection joy is not a puzzle to be solved with tidy answers, but a gift to be accepted, cherished and shared.

If you have experienced that gift, live the alleluia. And if not, spend time with someone who has. Their resurrection joy just might be contagious; you just might discover how freeing and life-changing God’s love can be.

Rev. Katy Anderson
Hopeful Saints Ministry
(All Saints Episcopal & Hope Lutheran)

Christmas and Easter, spiritual bookends

One of my early memories was leaving Pearl Harbor on a ship, the MSTs Lurline. It was an ocean liner, turned troop carrier in WW2, turned dependents transport during the Korean War.

I had just finished second grade, and as we left Pearl the band played “Aloha Oe.” Yeah, yeah, yeah.... adults had tears in their eyes, but we kids were excited and busy trying on our kapok life preservers. Almost a week later, I remember arriving in San Francisco, steaming in under the Golden Gate Bridge, and hearing the band strike up “California, Here I Come!” as we tied up to the pier. Again, lots of tears from the adults, and lots of anticipation from us kids wondering what the future would hold. We lived in hope for new adventures.

Those two songs were a rite of passage for military dependents plying the seas between the Hawaiian Islands and the US mainland. Kind of a going out and coming in for so many of us who grew up as Navy dependents: Musical bookends to a significant chapter in our lives.

Christmas and Easter are the same sort of spiritual bookends. From

When life is overwhelming

What do you do when your best plan falls flat? How do you stay strong when you have to watch someone you love fall into the grip of terminal disease? What do you say to your friend whose child is sick and may never get better?

Is there anything that can be said beyond the standard, “Think positive, praying for you, things will get better?” Is there any hope for a world bogged down in so much tragedy?

The difficulty in answering questions like these is speaking plainly, honestly and truthfully without sounding curt or insensitive. There is a great temptation to answer every question and calm every fear, but some questions are not for us to answer. Herein lies the rub.

You have been given by God a life filled with uncertainty. You really have no way of knowing what awaits you when you get out of the bed to face the day. This is all very overwhelming, frightening and disturbing. What do you do when you open your eyes and see this is the way the world is?

There are at least three options. Option one is to just not think about it because it is just too overwhelming and depressing. This may help you for a little while, but eventually it must be faced and can only be avoided so long. Option two is to give up and just not care because it is all meaningless anyway. This is tempting, but it too is insufficient and only ends in despair, an end we are trying to avoid.

This only leaves us with one more option, option three. What if there was a giant reset button that could be pushed to reset the world, erase every wrong, cure every disease and put everything back the way it is supposed to be? Wouldn’t you push that button? I would. The problem is that

“Silent Night, Holy Night” to “Christ the Lord Is Risen Today,” the significant chapter of our lives we call a liturgical year are marked with music. And I find that each of those hymns bring tears to my eyes just as “Aloha Oe” and “California, Here I Come” brought tears to the eyes of my parents.

The Christian, or liturgical year, begins four weeks before Christmas, and comes to a significant crescendo on Easter. Attendance in church is higher at Christmas and Easter than any other time of year. Those two events are the high points – bookends – of the Christian year for many people. One represents new life – the birth of the baby Jesus – and the other represents NEW LIFE, an absolute assurance of how beloved we are in the eyes of God. New life and NEW LIFE!

And, in a sense, both events bring out the child in us. Some of us concentrate on our faith at Christmas and Easter, making sure we get to the services as if they are a life preserver that we dare not fail to wear twice a year. No problem. All are welcome any time. And some of us look to what adventures lie ahead. What

this button would have to be so large, only God himself could push it.

I believe that such a button exists, and that God has pushed this button. He did so by literally stepping into history, stepping into our world, this physical world. When he came here, he saw human suffering with human eyes and he responded with tears (John 11:35). He saw us in sickness, in suffering, dealing with loss, miserable, and tormented. And being the great, good God he is; he did something about it. What did he do?

He pushed the reset button, and by pushing that button, he killed death. He who should have never died (God can’t die), died. Yes, you read that right, God died a horrible, gruesome death by being nailed to a tree. Then after dying, he was buried in a tomb and came back to life again three days later. He did something you and I could never do; he killed death, which is really our biggest problem. Suffering is just the symptom of the disease. The disease is death. Jesus has cured death itself.

Sound made up? Sound too fantastic to be true? You could go back to options one and two above. You have that freedom, but what if you stopped and considered that it is possible that all this is true?

How would your life and the way you saw life’s sorrows change if you knew that God is going to eventually set all things back right again? Would it make suffering, even the deepest of tragedy, bearable, maybe even palatable knowing that God sees it; God knows it and God will not allow it to go on forever? What if you knew that things won’t just eventually get better, but that they will end in victory?

Tripp Finch
Willow Creek Baptist Church

does new life mean? What does redemption look like or feel like in our lives? What place does salvation take in our thoughts and ponderings?

That is exactly what Easter is: a time of mystery and reflection. This is a season of new beginnings. This is the day of resurrection. In all our ups and downs in our day-to-day-lives, Easter is far more than a life preserver or passage under a bridge to the inbound passage to safe harbor. Easter is the ultimate symbol of new life. Resurrection is hope. The risen Christ is salvation in this life and the next. The empty grave means, paradoxically, that we are not alone.

So sing, this Easter, “Aloha Oe” to the old, and “California, Here We Come!” to the new. We are on the journey that Jesus tells us to never fear; one of adventure and new beginnings. Thank God for the journey! Celebrate Christ! Live in Easter hope and joy! Alleluia!

Rev. Jim Monroe
Heppner United Methodist Church

The verdict is reversed

Sir Nicholas Winton, dubbed the British Schindler, saved 669 children, mostly Jewish from Nazi death camps. On an internet video, Winton is being honored for his brave and loving deeds.

It started in 1988 in Maidenhead, Great Britain when Winton’s wife Greta found a scrapbook in an old dusty trunk in their attic. She opened the scrapbook, became fascinated and yet was puzzled by it all. This was, of course, 50 years after the events in the scrapbook happened.

Now knowing the scrapbook was discovered, Nicky Winton told his wife what he had kept secret all those years. His wife Greta went to London to try to give the story to several people, but nobody was interested, that is, until she contacted Dr. Elizabeth Maxwell, a Holocaust historian and the wife of newspaper magnate, Robert Maxwell. Maxwell then arranged for his newspaper to publish articles on Winton’s amazing deeds.

Winton’s story led to his appearance on Esther Rantzer’s BBC television program, That’s Life. In the studio, emotions ran high as “Winton’s Children” introduced themselves and expressed their gratitude for having their lives saved. Letters came from all over the world, and new faces still appear at his door, introducing themselves by names that match the documents from 1939.

“They got me there under false pretenses,” remembers Winton. “They sat me in a seat which was focused on the camera, and I didn’t know I was going to meet for the first time the children I brought over so many years before.”

With the program now live, the TV host began to talk about the scrapbook and the pictures and the man they were about to honor. Finally the host brought attention to the list at the back of the scrapbook of the children whose lives were spared.

One of the names, Vera Gissing was pointed out. She was identified in the audience, and then turned to a very surprised Nicholas Winton who was seated right next to her. Vera embraced and thanked a very tearful Nicholas Winton.

The TV host then asked, “Is there anyone else in our audience tonight who owes their life to Nicholas Winton? If so, could you stand up, please?” There are probably no words that could capture the emotions or the thoughts of Nicholas as he also stood and turned in amazement to see all the people around him standing, acknowledging that he had helped spare their lives.

This man, Sir Nicholas Winton, reversed the verdict on the lives of those he saved and secured a future for them. But as wonderful and noble as the deeds of Nicholas Winton are, they pale in comparison to the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Jesus reversed the verdict on our lives.

Our whole faith, everything we stand for, and our plea for pardon, hinges on the resurrection of Christ and the empty tomb.

From the Scriptures,

we get a glimpse of the evidence from the disciples of the resurrection. Acts 2:22-24 says, “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God... Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.”

In Acts 4: 10, we read, “Let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands before you whole.”

Acts 5: 30, 32 says, “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree.” “And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.”

To understand what ignited a movement that is still going strong, especially in other parts of the world, we need to understand the three points that the disciples demonstrated: He was killed; God raised Him; we witnessed His reappearance.

To any other person or people who started a movement, it was only the first point that was fulfilled. That is, you killed him or he died. God did not raise Mohammed; God did not raise Buddha; God did not raise any other man. But God did raise His son Jesus and it was witnessed by others.

Before the crucifixion the disciples believed this was the end. The final point. To those who were there, there was nothing else to be said. The Jews condemned Him and the Romans crucified Him. That’s why after the resurrection Peter could say with confidence, but God raised Him. We thought it was over, but God raised Him and God vindicated Jesus.

The resurrection was proof that Jesus was really raised from the dead and that He was and is the Son of God and King of Kings. He became the curse so that we would not have to die.

So now we have an idea of why Peter and the other disciples could not stay silent about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They met someone who would pay the price for something they were about to pay for. Jesus did not say we did not deserve to die for our sins, but He willingly took the punishment that was meant for us on the cross.

So why after finding out the identity of the man who saved her life did Vera Gissing start singing the praises of Nicholas Winton? Because the verdict on her life and on the lives of the other 668 children was reversed. In the same way, the disciples could not keep silent on what Jesus did on the cross and how God had raised Him on the third day. He was resurrected, so everything He says is true and reliable. In Christ, your verdict is reversed. Amen.

Dr. Carmelo A. Di Salvo
Valby Lutheran Church

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