



Alone but not forsaken

We find ourselves in the middle of a historical event most of us will likely never experience again. It is the type of circumstance people will tell their children or grandchildren about. Of course, if you haven't already guessed, the event to which I refer is the COVID-19 crisis.

Aside from all the historical consequences of the coronavirus, there is a human and emotional toll that is difficult to measure and that does not really fit into any metric we have to assess damage. The feelings of loneliness, finitude, and even abandonment are front and center in our collective psyche.

Real questions arise as to why otherwise healthy people will die from this? Why will many lose their jobs and businesses? Has God abandoned us? Why would He allow such a widespread, global disaster to take place? Has God forsaken us?

There was a man many years ago who cried out the very words, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" That man was alone and had been abandoned by his friends in his hour of greatest need. He had been treated unfairly and unjustly by a government that cared little about what happened to him personally. His words were not empty words. He had in fact been forsaken by God. But why?

This man is Jesus of Nazareth. What seemed to many at the time like meaningless suffering had a divine purpose. All of the evil of the world was dumped on him by God when he was nailed to a cross by the Roman Government. All of what is wrong with the world was laid at his nail pierced feet. He experienced a loneliness and abandonment that can never be matched. He was abandoned by God so that we would never be abandoned by God.

The simple truth of what Jesus has done for us has the power to bring you peace during the days we find ourselves in. Jesus knows exactly how you feel right now. He too experienced the pain of loneliness and abandonment. He knows how it feels but not just in an empathic way. He does not just know how it feels, he has done something to correct it. That correction is the cross.

Because of what Jesus did on the cross, any tragedy we experience is just temporary. Any disease we contract or heartache we experience or burden we bear is brief because eternity is waiting on the other side. An eternity without respiratory disease, without broken hearts, without loneliness and without pain of any kind. It is a promise sealed with the greatest expression of love the world has ever known, a perfect man who needed nothing, gave everything to imperfect people who needed everything.

That love took on the shape of a rugged cross and was sealed with an empty tomb. This Easter when you feel abandoned, or just plain lonely in quarantine, remember this is temporary. This one day will give way to fields that will shimmer in eternal sunlight for those who just simply believe and draw near to this man, Jesus.

Tripp Finch, Willow Creek Baptist Church

What have you been doing over the past five weeks?

The Season of Lent began with Ash Wednesday, February 26th, and for the Christian, Lent is traditionally a time of sacrifice and reflection. Many often "fast" from, (give up), either a certain food or drink. Others choose to abstain from a hobby, favorite pastime or any other activity that requires some amount of time and energy – the goal being to instead apply that time and energy, or food and drink, to deepening our relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

This particular Season of Lent has been drastically different from those we have experienced before and, rather than voluntarily, we have been forced to give up our normal lives and try to find ways to adapt. This "problem" can seem frustrating, frightening, perhaps overwhelming. It might even lead a person into feeling like just giving up and giving in to their fear, frustration, anger or despondency.

In spite of this, over the past few weeks I have been blessed to witness acts of sacrifice, support and encouragement, love and care, that are uplifting to the soul... that put wind in one's sails. At the same time, there are some who are investing the valuable resources of the time and energy of their lives in attitudes and behaviors that tear down, rather than build up. Social networking sites such as Facebook provide evidence of the attitude and kind of thinking that are associated with the two choices we are given.

Yet, what happens if we intentionally choose to re-frame our thinking, and instead look for the opportunities for better things that may exist in the midst of all that is happening?

What if we did away with pride, arguments and pretenses that run counter to God, and instead take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ? What if we intentionally used the time we've been given for reflection and identifying where we are in life, where Christ would like us to be, and what we need to do in order to get there? What if we choose to pay more attention to the rainbow in the clouds, rather than the storm?

Poet Maya Angelou once wrote, "God puts rainbows in the clouds so that each of us – in the dreariest and most dreaded moments – can see a possibility of hope." At another time, she also wrote, "Each of us has the power and responsibility to become a rainbow in the clouds."

In the midst of all that's happening, all that's changing, all that's uncertain, remember that God is the same today as he was yesterday, and will be tomorrow, and that He "... has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." (2 Timothy 1:7, NIV).

Messages of Easter hope from local pastors

A living hope

As social distancing becomes our new normal, for now at least, we will find ourselves celebrating the empty tomb in an empty church. It's a comfort to know that hundreds will be hovering around us in real time on the web to celebrate the resurrection with us, but it's just not the same. Christianity assumes community, not isolation, and a love that extends physically and visibly to friend and foe alike.

But the contradiction we're confronted with this year aligns well with our faith in a Savior who was himself a massive contradiction. Jesus was a king but born into poverty. He lived a sinless life but kept company with sinners and outcasts. According to the Gospel of John, he was with God from the beginning, the very beginning, when God breathed into a lump of clay the breath of life, and yet he let that created world beat him down and betray him and nail him to a cross. He died, but God's love was stronger than death, and he lives.

Our church buildings, like the tomb, may be empty this Easter but the promises the church proclaims and the tomb revealed are not empty. Death no longer has the last word. We are invited to live in God's presence forever, beginning now. And, thankfully, the God of contradictions is not limited by our expectations. We are loved, not rejected, even when we're fearful. We are forgiven, not condemned, even when we doubt. We can have hope, even when our way of life has been upended by an invisible enemy, because God is with us every minute of it, whether stressful or peaceful.

This Easter and the days that follow, let's contradict the chaos inflicted by COVID-19. Let's erupt with gratitude for our blessings. Let's choose to be joyful and thankful, no matter what happens, because God will always have the last word and God's love will always win in the end.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." (1 Peter 1:3)

**Rev. Katy Anderson
Hopeful Saints Ministry
A Lutheran & Episcopal partnership**

When the rock rolls away

Presently we are sheltering in our homes and when we leave our homes for errands we try to practice "social distancing." I don't think it should be called "social distancing" but it is "physical distancing."

Now is the time to do a spiritual self-examination of ourselves. Are we going to continue the way we always lived our lives or is it time for a 180 degree turn of our lives? My life has changed since high school, to logging, to ranching, to being a pastor of a church. I had to roll a big rock out of my life. Years of listening to the world (the rock) and living in the world, I rolled the rock away.

Now is the time to evaluate ourselves and check our whole being of who we are going to be? Easter is coming but we need to treat each day as the celebration of the resurrection. So how are we going to treat ourselves and our friends and neighbors? That rock couldn't hold Jesus from paving the way for us to a new life. He gave His life for us so we can have a life-changing experience, and living an upholding life of love, faith, and forgiveness in the Savior of the world because of his resurrection when the Rock Rolled Away.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." (John 3:16-17)

Pastor Norman Lee, Heppner Nazarene Church

The Apostle Paul once wrote to the church in Ephesus, "... I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." (Ephesians 4:1-6, NIV).

You see, in our lives today we can choose where we focus our time and attention – and with Easter being God's gift of hope and new beginnings as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus – we can choose to receive that gift and share it with others. Through Christ we all have the ability to be rainbows in the clouds.

Blessings to you and yours,
Pastor Jeff, Ione Community Church

Easter thoughts

Good Friday:

Jesus died for all of us on Passover weekend. He became our Passover, our covering from sin, in fact 2 Cor. 5:21 says, He became sin for us. On the Cross, the vast break in our relationship with God was reconciled. The gap that sin had created behind humanity and God was closed. The incurable curse of sin was lifted, the chains of bondage were broken.

Sabbath rest day:

Jesus rested from His work of our salvation on the seventh day; just like he had some 4,000 years before at creation of this planet and humanity. In this day of rest Jesus shows us that resting is very important, that we need to follow His example of rest once a week, and even more so we need to rest in Him from the stress of sin and life on this planet each day.

Resurrection Morning:

The victory over sin was confirmed as Jesus stepped back into life. In the wee hours of the early morning darkness, He was called forth from the Tomb, destroying the grip that death had on humanity. Granting to His human brothers and sisters a hope of escaping this death pit we call home. The resurrection is the promise of life eternal with Him, and it is the proof that all God's promises are 100 percent true. The most glorious of these are 1. Freedom from the bondage of sin in our lives today, 2. The promise of His return for His own, which will be very soon.

Please accept the knocking of Jesus on your life, at this time. Rev. 3:20

Elder Erik Wenberg, Heppner Seventh-day Adventist Church

Season of hope

Easter, the word alone carries hope for a world in crisis. You may think I am talking about the current crisis dealing with COVID-19 but I am not. Oh, I believe we are in a crisis which, I, like you, pray will be over before much longer. A crisis that is fueled by something Easter did away with which is the fear of death. Let me come back to that thought in a moment.

I, like many of you, am disappointed that we will not be able to celebrate Easter in our normal fashion. Easter egg hunts will only be able to include our families in our own yards and not the large rat race of the community egg hunt. Easter lunch will be at home with only the family in our home, so grandma and grandpa will not be able to see the little ones in their new Easter outfits except for whatever technology they use. I, like you, will not be able to sit around the table with my siblings and my parents and enjoy all the different food that has been prepared. Frankly, that may be best for the waistline.

However, and let me be very clear, I will be celebrating Easter. I will be up at sunrise to celebrate the "hope" that Easter signifies. Come Easter Sunday the tomb will still be empty, and Jesus will still be at the right hand of God. Come Easter Sunday His work on the cross will still have been done and its purpose will still be whole. Come Easter Sunday the means of salvation and victory over death will still be a reality through Jesus Christ. Come Easter Sunday you and I will still have hope because of these realities.

Back to that thought from earlier. The crisis we truly face is not the crisis of COVID-19. The crisis humanity has faced since the garden of Eden is death and separation from our creator because of our sin. That is a crisis that we have been given a vaccination for through the blood of Jesus. It is through Him we have been given hope. Hope over death. Hope for eternity. Hope and not fear.

So friends, may I encourage you to not be people of fear but be people of hope. Put your hope and your faith in the One who died for you and overcame the grave so we do not need to be people of fear but people of hope.

Happy Easter.

Ray DeLoe, Heppner Christian Church



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