

Column

Christmas 1933 was grim in the small eastern Florida town of Crescent City. Not only was the Great Depression on, a school bus crash at a rural railroad crossing left 11 children dead, with many others seriously injured. One contemporary account said it all: “The year without Christmas.”

Some may be moved to say something similar about Easter 2020. No great church services with soaring choirs, no public egg hunts, no large gatherings of family and friends feasting on lamb and ham. All have been put on hold because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Let’s refrain, though, from making any such pronouncement. No matter how sombre the moment, the fact of Easter remains. Something happened 2000 years ago because of which the world is a different place. We can, therefore, throughout the entire 40 days of Eastertide say to ourselves and to those we talk to on the telephone: Christ is Risen! And they can still respond: “He is risen indeed!”

What was true in years past remains true in 2020. Jesus, the promised Messiah of Israel, has trampled death by death and is alive for evermore. More than that, this event is more than a curious past happening: it has a future dimension?

What happened to Jesus that first Easter morning is slated to happen to all of Jesus’ believing people. They are promised more than mere survival of some immaterial bit of their past selves. Rather, they have been given a pledge and promise of real transformed bodies, bodies not subject to death and decay, bodies suited for a transformed world. Revelation 21:1 speaks of this transformed world as “a new heaven and new earth.”

What this central Christian belief should say to us in this year of grace and sorrow 2020 is that neither the coronavirus nor any of the changes and chances of this mortal life can extinguish our hope. “Christ is risen from the dead and become the first-fruits of them that slept” (1 Corinthians 15:20) remains a real and eternal reality.

Let, therefore, nothing take away your joy. Over the 40 days of Eastertide, read and re-read the accounts of the empty tomb recorded in the New Testament, along with St. Paul’s commentary on this event in such passages as Romans 6 and 1 Corinthians 15. Think about how they apply to you.

Above all, don't keep your joy and hope to yourself. The coronavirus is certainly contagious, but so is the joy and hope that springs from the resurrection of Jesus. Resolve to be a carrier of this good infection. Breath it out!

ALMIGHTY God, who through thine only-begotten Son Jesus Christ hast overcome death, and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life; We humbly beseech thee that, as by thy special grace preventing us thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost ever, one God, world without end. Amen.

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