

Saturday, April 6

2 Corinthians 4:16—5:10 *So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.* (v.16 NRSV)

Both my husband and I are senior citizens. We often talk about how, when we were growing up, no one warned us about what getting older would be like. We also agree that we wouldn't want to remain the stupid, clueless, less-than-moral young people we were 40 years ago. Yes, our "outer nature is wasting away," but thanks to both of us having a relationship with Jesus Christ—and aging—we've acquired a wisdom and a groundedness that we now treasure. Some things don't work as well as they used to, but so little bothers us anymore.

Getting over ourselves is the first step to greater wisdom—and embodies the humility we should all have as followers of Jesus. Aging seems to help this along. Proverbs 6:31 (NLT) says: "Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained by living a godly life." That's good to know. This coming week, pray for an aging friend or relative; call, visit, or write an encouraging card.

Exodus 13:17—14:4; Psalm 145; Mark 12:18-27

by Nina George-Hacker

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Easter Sunday, March 31

John 1:1-18 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him....* (vv.1-3a NRSV)

I was raised in the Church but didn't come to know Christ as my personal Lord and Savior until I was 33. Even so, I wasn't 100 percent certain he was God. At that time, I lived on the 23rd floor of a Manhattan apartment building and my kitchen window went almost to the ceiling, offering a stunning view of the sky. One night, I stood in that darkened space looking up at the starry heavens. A quiet voice suddenly said to me: "I was there when they were made." I knew it was Jesus! I ran to my Bible and flipped it open to John 1. Then I fell on my face and worshipped the One through whom all things were made—Jesus Christ who lives forever, and whose glorious resurrection we celebrate today!

I love Easter for so many reasons—spiritual and theological, aesthetic and cultural. Growing up Greek Orthodox and now an Anglican, I get to celebrate it twice every year. "Easter! Easter!" (So much better than "Pizza! Pizza!") Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Exodus 12:1-14; Psalms 148, 149, 150

Monday, April 1

1 Corinthians 15:1-11 *Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures and ... he was buried and ... was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures....* (vv.3b-4)

Paul encapsulates the entire gospel in two verses—and assures us God's plan for salvation is backed up by His word. Christian faith isn't complicated. The Holy Spirit gives us grace to believe that Jesus made atonement for our sins—something we could never do. And, that he was raised from the dead—something God will do for us, too, if we believe!

So, why do many reject the good news of the gospel? I suppose it's difficult for people to admit they are sinners in God's sight and there's no remedy except through a crucified and risen Savior. Another factor may be that believers don't share the gospel message enough. Why not? What have we got to lose? First Peter 3:15 (CEV) says: "Always be ready to give an answer when someone asks you about your hope." You may not be an evangelist, but we Christians are people of the Resurrection, filled with hope! Be prepared to share that hope and joy with others. It may truly make a difference in their lives.

Exodus 12:14-27; Psalms 93, 98; Mark 16:1-8

Tuesday, April 2

Mark 16:9-20 *“This age of lawlessness and unbelief is under Satan, who does not allow the truth and power of God to prevail over the unclean things of the spirits. Therefore reveal your righteousness now”—thus they spoke to Christ. And Christ replied to them, “The term of years of Satan’s power has been fulfilled, but other terrible things draw near.”* (v.14 footnote NRSVUE)

During this Eastertide, as nature is renewed around us in beauty and we are celebrating the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ with great joy, we are also cognizant of the mess our world is in: wars; climate disasters; widespread hunger, poverty and disease; political oppression and hatred; racial violence and mass shootings ... the list seems endless. It does appear as if “this age of lawlessness and unbelief is under Satan.” All the more reason we must cling tightly to the truth of both God’s *written* word, the Bible, and God’s *living* Word, Jesus Christ.

All of Scripture provides us with God’s vision of *shalom*, when peace and justice shall prevail, and all shall be reconciled and renewed. Just read today’s psalm, filled with praise for all the Lord does for us—healing and forgiveness. Let us not give in to despair over the state of this world that is passing away. Rather, focus on our mighty God who’s still in charge—and the better things coming to all who believe in His Son. Thanks be to God. Alleluia!

Exodus 12:28-39; Psalm 103; 1 Corinthians 15:12-28

Wednesday, April 3

Exodus 12:40-51 *All the Israelites did just as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron. That very day the Lord brought the Israelites out of the land of Egypt, company by company.* (vv.50-51 NRSV)

My Jewish friends look to the first Passover and the Exodus—their deliverance from Egypt—as eternally encouraging signs of the Lord’s goodness and power. We Anglicans look to Jesus’ Last Supper (a Passover meal) for his continuing presence with us in the Eucharist, and to his sacrificial death on the cross—our deliverance from death and hell—as lasting signs of God’s love and sovereignty.

In years past, our parish celebrated a Christian Seder during Holy Week. The food served and the texts read helped us connect the ancient Hebrews’ freedom from slavery to their oppressors to our freedom from slavery to sin. I believe it’s the same story—in two parts. Christians have been grafted into the tree of Judaism. In Romans 11:17a-18, Paul writes: “you, a wild ... shoot, were grafted among the others to share the rich root of the ... tree, do not boast over the branches. If you do boast, remember: you do not support the root, but the root supports you.” As merely different branches of the same tree rooted in one God, there is no place for antisemitism.

Thursday, April 4

Matthew 28:16-20 *Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him; but some doubted.* (vv.16-17 RSV)

Wait a minute. What? How can “but some doubted” immediately follow “they worshiped him”? I understand the “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief” spirituality of today’s followers of Jesus—at a 2,000-year remove from his earthly presence. But the “eleven disciples” actually knew Jesus in the flesh! They were eyewitnesses to his resurrection, and are now personally experiencing his ascension into heaven. How could they possibly harbor a shred of doubt?

Perhaps the supernatural was just as hard for them to understand in 33 A.D. as it is for us to fathom in the 21st century. But we don’t have to understand God’s ways before we can worship Him. The Lord is worthy of our adoration, awe, and praise no matter what we think. The late Frederick Buechner once quipped: “Doubt is the ants in the pants of faith.” Maybe doubt and faith are often partners, such that we can’t judge the disciples’ mixed reaction to Christ’s ascension. After all, what do we mere humans know? “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 1:11 ESV).

Exodus 13:3-10; Psalms 146, 147; 1 Corinthians 15:41-50

Friday, April 5

Psalm 136 *Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his mercy endures for ever. Give thanks to the God of gods, for his mercy endures for ever.* (vv.1-2 BCP)

Whenever this psalm is assigned in the Episcopal Church’s Daily Office, I tend to want to read a different psalm, because I find that reciting “his mercy endures for ever” 26 times becomes tedious and distracting. Unlike how I read it, Israel’s “hymn book” was meant to be sung antiphonally. The cantor would sing the verse, and the choir would respond with “his mercy endures forever.”

But perhaps I’m overlooking the most important aspect of this psalm: Its repeated assurance of God’s everlasting mercy toward us—or, as the NRSV puts it, “his steadfast love endures forever.” Just in case we didn’t catch on, the first ten times. We humans get so full of ourselves or so down in the dumps, we tend to forget God loves us unconditionally and forever, extending to us mercy and forgiveness we don’t deserve. So maybe we must “endure” this psalm’s repetitive phrasing to remind ourselves of God’s enduring grace. Thank You, Lord!

Exodus 13:1-2, 11-16; 1 Corinthians 15:51-58; Luke 24:1-12