

AUDEMUS

To Members of the Board of Trustees and Close Friends of San Francisco Theological Seminary

APRIL 2017

Dear Friends,

I heard some powerful Easter messages this year. Here are a few snippets:

From my friend, Roy Howard, pastor of Saint Mark Presbyterian Church in Rockville, MD:

“The women at the tomb know that the resurrection of Jesus reframes everything. Life will never be the same because life is no longer enslaved by the finality of death. They are filled with fear and joy, the very feelings that make life exhilarating. Living with fear and joy puts you right on the edge where you know your life is dependent upon God and God’s power in you. All the women want to do is share the news. Lest we forget, as we have so often, let me say again: the community of faith is born from the witness of women who are filled with fear and joy. When the Church forgets the witness of women who boldly tell the good news, it always stumbles into the dark ways of hubris.

If death reframes everything in its brutal power to annihilate life, **the resurrection is the great reframing of all things, even death itself.** That is the heart of the Christian faith that the women share so boldly.”

My pastor, Joanne Whitt at First Presbyterian Church, San Anselmo, said this:

“What unexpected truth does resurrection tell us? The Gospels don’t spell it out. They do show us a lot about the person who was raised – about Jesus. As a child, he was a refugee. As an adult, he had no place to lay his head. He broke the rules about holiness. He spoke out against the government. He insisted that mercy triumphs over judgment. He chose to love and live among religious and political outcasts, and called them beloved children of God – and that made him an outcast, as well. He called proper, upstanding people hypocrites and said that love was more important than money, power, status, everything – so important that we need to love even our enemies – our enemies, for God’s sake.”

“Resurrection invites us to join Jesus in Humanity 2.0, in ‘resurrection life.’ **Resurrection life says, ‘You don’t have to wait for some distant future to start practicing kindness, nonviolence, reconciliation, reverence, joy, hope, neighborliness, and peace. You can leave the old humanity behind and start practicing Humanity 2.0 now.’** We can join the resurrection, now. We can rise. Now.”

SFTS professor, Laurie Garrett-Cobbina, offered this in her Easter meditation:

“Christ has set resurrection loose in the world! Resurrection is the guiding power in our everyday lives to get up again and again and again. Even when we do not recognize the angels around us or Jesus facing us, resurrection is at work. It is up to all of us to let resurrection loose in our hearts and minds and bodies. **It is up to us to let the resurrected Christ infuse us with the power to hope, to live, and to never tire of living into a new story of possibility.**”

Many of you preached an Easter sermon. And those who didn’t preach on Easter probably heard one. Preaching on Easter is not easy. Proclaiming resurrection is a hard sell – whether 2000 years ago in the first century, or now in the 21st. The Gospels offer no proofs; they don’t even try to explain the meaning of what happened on the third day. They just tell the story – and not even the same story, exactly. But there’s power in the story and in the telling of it, as my three friends and colleagues illustrate so well.

Just so, every year for the last 2000 years, across the globe, Christians gather together to rejoice in the Easter proclamation – Christ is risen! – even as we struggle to understand its meaning and live the good news that God raised Jesus from the dead. As mysterious and perplexing as the Easter story is, it retains its power to enthrall and engender hope.

Yes, we gather *together* on Easter. Attendance in church is always much higher on Easter Day. It doesn't seem to be enough simply to sit at home and read the text silently to ourselves. We need the energy, strength, courage, and wisdom that a community of faith provides as we try to embody and live out the Easter message. In the weeks, months, and years that followed that first Easter, the focus was not on the personal changes in individual lives so much as on the communities that banded together to support and encourage one another and witness collectively to the new reality that they were beginning to experience. Easter created new communities and transformed older ones. Resurrection faith is a communal faith.

There is no packaged set of propositions about Easter that can be neatly summarized for everyone in every time and place. Easter cannot be reduced to a tidy belief system. It's a realm, a way of being, an alternate reality to the Good Friday world that dehumanizes, objectifies, oppresses, violates, dominates, and kills the human spirit, body and soul. Easter points us to the truth about life lived in the embrace of the divine power of love, and urges us to seek it and discover it.

And so on Easter we not only gather together, but we *sing* together. We sing our alleluias! We sing them with full voice and open hearts. We sing for joy: there's hardly anything more fully human, more fully alive than that. It's the glory of God, as Ireneaus once said.

Laurie Garrett-Cobbina's Easter meditation was the culmination of the SFTS Lenten Devotions written by various members of the seminary community, an email that was sent to more than 2500 people every day during the 40 days and six Sundays of Lent. Those devotions were organized and produced by Scott Clark, our Associate Dean of Student Life and Chaplain. It was a labor of love for Scott, and a great gift to all who received them. I was struck by the diversity, beauty, depth, and honesty of the reflections, and my Lenten journey was enhanced. And more to the point, the devotional contributions from our community made the celebration of Easter all the more precious and meaningful.

As we live through these difficult and dangerous times, I pray that we will continue to encourage one another in our collective efforts to seek the truth of Easter, to live it and proclaim it.

Christ is risen!



Rev. Dr. James L. McDonald,
President and Professor of Faith and Public Life

P.S. – Thank you for your support and prayers for SFTS! Exciting things are happening here at the Seminary. The Center for Innovation in Ministry has been sponsoring cutting-edge conversations this spring, and several new initiatives are in the works. More than 150 individuals have responded thus far to the challenge grant from a generous group of SFTS Trustees that matches every new dollar raised by June 30. Please consider your own gift!



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In Christ. A New Creation.