

Regarding Easter:

We weren't meant for pain, for suffering and sorrow and poverty and hoarding. We weren't meant for cancers and rotten teeth and aching joints and sleepless nights, or the empty pleasures of addiction—empty calories, empty violence, empty lusts, empty highs. Creation wasn't meant to become our enemy, and the universe wasn't meant to depend on death and failure for its expansion. The truth that God can work out all things for our good in a world driven by death is a daily miracle that ought to drop us to our knees.

Because we weren't meant for death and its friends, its symptoms, its power.

We know our history. Our first parents sinned: We traded the presence of God for some shiny food, tricked by our first enemy--just like we trade our integrity each time we curse someone for the same things we do. And Death had its way with us. And with Death came fear, came the sense of our own mortality, with death came the fighting over whatever we still find shiniest and tasty and pleasing in our own eyes.

Death took charge, took over, because we unleashed it on God's world, and we came to believe that death itself was the only escape from all the terrors that death itself brought on us. It's been our trafficker and our dealer, and we have been its slaves and its addicts, and too often, once we've gained power, we've doled death out. The world became a zero sum

game, and for me to win, you have to lose. But even then, we just tricked ourselves into believing that winning until we died was worth something. But it isn't. We've been playing against death's house, eating, drinking, and making merry while it waits to chuck us to the curb. And the house always wins.

Jesus beat the house. He beat death not by chance and skill, but by faithfulness, by obedience...by his deep belief that God loved him and his deep dependance on the Spirit of God alive in him.

And we who have the Spirit of God alive in us, what Paul calls God's good-faith deposit on our own resurrection, we who live with the same faithfulness and obedience and trust that Christ lived with, we will share in the glory of the risen Lord, which is his return from death. Death will not triumph over us. We are vaccinated against it, and we pass the vaccine on to those who listen and learn from us.

We have to get this: Jesus' resurrection, the first Easter, was the most important day in the history of the world. We gather on Sunday, the Lord's Day, Resurrection Day, because we're constantly meant to be rehearsing and remembering Easter.

Without Jesus' resurrection, there is no Christianity, there is no hope beyond this life, with its sin and pain and terror and burdens. Death really, truly is our only way to get to "pie in the sky, by and by." But the great hope of Christianity is

Jesus' return, and the end of death. The end of things that go stale, wilt, die. If resurrection isn't true, and Jesus' wasn't, then death still wins. Even if we end up ghostly, floating on clouds with harps and at peace, somehow, Death still got us in the end.

We fail when we think our only hope is to flee the world, to "get to heaven;" heaven is a way-station, a landing place. Even the saints who have gone before us, and have joined the great cloud of witnesses that urge us on in faithfulness, what they want is Jesus' return, God's Kingdom come on earth as it is in the heavens. They want the other side of heaven, when the universe and this world and humanity is set free from death's grip on everything.

When Jesus' Resurrection gives way to the resurrection of all of us at his return and the judgment of the world, we'll gather with those we have lost to death, and the pain of that loss will be fully undone. The sting will be fully gone, replaced, instead, with the touch and scent and presence of those who we have so deeply missed.

Hear me: Our great hope isn't something like the resurrection of the dead, something like death dying, something like coming back to life. Our great hope is coming back to life. Coming back to life, never to die again, is only a powerful metaphor because it happened once, to one person, permanently. The great hope at the heart of Easter, the heart of Christianity, is that death will die, and all God's People will

be freed from it, alive again in a universe set free from death and all its doings, sin and all it releases into the world.

And Easter was our invitation, as Christians—or, rather, our mandate—to fast from death. To reject all the ways and habits that lead to it.

Because our sin doesn't lead to our death, we reject vengeance and pay back, making sure we don't force others to pay us back for their sins against us. Because we have been provided for until Jesus returns, we reject gathering more for ourselves than we need, and taking more than our share from those who have little to spare. Because we don't fear death, we don't cling to youth, and instead embrace the wisdom that comes of a long life well-lived. Honoring it.

And yes, it's true that until Jesus returns, and ends death forever, we will die. As John Donne puts it, we all have one "short sleep" to pass through. And those who have died before us in the Lord even now are in the hand of God, at peace and rest. But again even they look forward to what we look forward to, even they await what creation itself is groaning with longing for--Jesus' return, and death's death.

And until the death of death, until after the return of the Lord, until he comes we vaccinated ones, who live without fear and vengeance, we're meant to live freely, in service to the world, carrying their sufferings as we can, so that they might, somehow be carried into the realization that God

loves them fiercely and fully, and longs to free them from what we've been freed from.

We've been inoculated against death. Jesus is our vaccine, which we take by faith. And we are the medicine for a world sick with and sick of death. We've been salted into the world, so it might taste what a life of forgiveness, trust, and peace can be. We shed light on the shameful secrets a death-driven, sinful world keeps, and driven by our own forgiveness, we show forgiveness. We wait for the return of the only one who can be truly called alive, and meanwhile we act as agents of life. We resist responding to hate with hate, to fear with fear, to violence with violence, to indifference with indifference. We make human the ones the world dehumanizes. We side with the ones the world rejects. We see for the ones the world blinds, and speak for those the world mutes. Instead of giving death back when it's given to us, we respond with grace, safe in the promise that the love of God has put us beyond death's reach, and the promise that all things can be made good for us. In grief, we have hope.

We are ourselves called to reach back into the way this world casually, carelessly, positions people to die, and instead offer our lives, driven by faith, by hope, by love.

In all this, we stand firm, faithful, letting nothing move us and always giving ourselves fully to the work of the Lord because we know that our labor in the Lord isn't "in vain," useless; it

will outlast death and all the decay of the world, because we ourselves do so to.

So: “..stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” Keep Easter alive in you. Nurture it. Long for the day when all our bodies are as they should have been, without illnesses, without pains, cancers, exhaustion and anxieties. Without all of death’s derivatives. Think of the world to come, where there will be enough for all, and no fear. No estrangement, no grief, no great unmet longings or secret regrets. Daydream how together we can fight death until Christ’s return by making this world more like the one to come.

Every good meal, every intimate touch, every burst of laughter, every blessing of our senses...when each ends, it’s a reminder that we look forward to a world in which they will not end, and death and its doings will not interrupt them. Jesus’ resurrection is our promise that day will come, and we, along with the world, will be renewed. Easter will be everyday, we’ll eat and drink and be glad without fear. No one will have attended death’s funeral. All creation will be changed into glory, and “mourning, crying, and pain will be no more.”