

Editorial: Fear not—why we need Easter this year

March 23, 2016

We always need Easter, of course. But this year, we need it more than usual.

Easter provides the antidote for the perpetual, damnable, fatal human infection we call sin. Fanned to a fever by fear, we've rarely, if ever, been more susceptible to sin's sickness.

For millennia, Jews and then Christians have believed all humanity suffered spiritual affliction when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden. We contaminated our souls by choosing our own way over God's, by exerting our own will rather than accepting God's perfect plan. The gnawing ache we feel in the pit of our souls is the spiritual nausea that overwhelms us when we're sin-sick and longing for the respite of redemption.

The Apostle Paul described it like this ...

- “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).
- “The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). • “But God demonstrates his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).
- “If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9).
- “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).
- “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

- “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).

All humanity always needs Easter, because our sins need to be forgiven.

Only Jesus' perfect sacrifice could provide atonement for all our sins. That weekend—when Jesus died on the cross, lay in the grave, descended into hell, and rose from the grave victorious over death—marked the hinge of time and all history. Our lives pivot on the crucifixion/resurrection. Our destiny is set by the personal, intimate decision to accept or reject the gift of eternal life bought with the sacrifice of Jesus' body and blood.

Something about Easter

We also need to celebrate Easter every year, because we need to remember.

We must recall the breadth of the Father's love and the depth of Jesus' sacrifice that makes eternal life possible. The work and worry and joy and sorrow and struggle and euphoria of our everyday lives distract us. We need Easter to help us remember. Of course, each Sunday echoes Easter, and each time we gather at the communion table, we remember the Lord's sacrifice. These help us focus. But something about Easter, when all Christendom remembers together, bolsters our faith.

This year, however, we especially need Easter.

On Tuesday of Holy Week, explosions in Belgium reminded us that fear and fragility mark our physical existence like a macabre tattoo. The shadow of terrorism slides across every corner of our world. Augmented as it is by the radical distortion of Islam, that shadow glides over three

victims—brutalized people and their families and friends, people who fear they or their family or friends will be brutalized next, and also decent, peace-loving Muslims whose only “fault” is sharing a world religion with terrorists.

Even before bombs shredded Belgium, U.S. politicians—especially those who would be president—already had frayed our nerves. In 2016, fear is a political weapon. The people who have asked us to trust our nation’s future to their care have exploited fear for their own gain. Their use of fear is obscene; they ramp it up beyond reality in order to distort themselves into superheroes (actually it’s “superhero,” because each claims to be the only one) who can protect us from that which cannot be predicted.

Fear is not ultimate

And so, in this political year, we particularly need Easter. Easter reminds us only God’s love and Jesus’ sacrifice are ultimate. Yes, terrorism is real. So are economic hardship, class division, educational underachievement, trade imbalances and all the other real-time boogymen people fear. We must do what we can about them, and that includes wisely choosing leaders. But those things we fear are not ultimate, much less eternal.

Easter reminds us life consumes death.

Easter reminds us good overcomes evil.

Easter reminds us God prevails over Satan.

Easter reminds us perfect love casts out fear.

Easter 2016 calls us to live everyday lives of faith and courage and, yes, even holy optimism.

This Sunday, say with the church throughout time: “Christ is risen, indeed.”

And fear not.