

## Editor's Foreword

As we approach Easter this year, we can be forgiven if we don't entirely believe that things are finally normalizing. After months, indeed years, of experiencing the ravages of COVID-19—and the heartbreaking medical, social, global, and political crises that have accompanied this plague's visitation—we dare not lower our guard even as we exchange the minor keys of Lent for the joyous triumph of Easter. Even if most of us have opened our sanctuaries once again for embodied worship, the word *normalizing* is a hard one to utter in these times. You will sense that reticence in many of the articles in this year's Easter issue of *Journal for Preachers*.

In fact, Austin Seminary Homiletics Professor Jennifer Lord clearly states in her lead essay "Preaching Graveside" that we are not back to normal, "and," she says, "we are not sure that we will ever be back to normal." She therefore encourages us in this year's Easter preparations to first envision the rite of burial and then "to honestly acknowledge that we are preaching a graveside service on Easter Sunday." Is this a new move for this coming Easter? No, not at all. Dr. Lord insists that we recall "what ministers have done century after century, in every corner of the globe, no matter the season, and no matter the cause of death. We stand graveside with the deceased before us while proclaiming the foolishness of faith: 'I am the resurrection and the Life,' audaciously, starkly, boldly proclaiming resurrection in the presence of death." I challenge you preachers to read this bold essay joyfully, for as Jennifer Lord concludes, "You continually show us that weighed down though we are, there is a way forward, which is to trust our true life in the One who is The Way."

The Reverend Tom Are, Jr., Pastor of the Village Presbyterian Church in Prairie Village, KS, offers a similar take on Easter in his amazing sermon "Resurrection Is No Fairy Tale." Resurrection, Are says, "is not just the promise that life doesn't end. It is the promise that life is being made right. It's not the veracity of resurrection that is hard to address; it's the modesty of resurrection. Resurrection leaves a rather humble fingerprint on the world." Dr. Richard E. Spalding, the former Chaplain at Williams College, who is currently serving as Interim Pastor at Old South Church in Boston, notes that for some of us, at least some of the time, "Easter steals upon us, not with a trumpet fanfare or a flash of unequivocal light or insight or evidence, but in an infinitesimal turning of our nature toward its wholeness, a thread-by-thread reweaving of fear and love, a deliberate recollection of all the grace we have gathered and all the story that has ever saved our lives, an atom by atom transfiguration of an old day into a new day."

We are also so pleased to welcome to these pages the Reverend Dr. Tyshawn Gardner, an African Methodist Episcopal pastor and the Associate Professor of Biblical and Religious Studies at Samford University, and the Director of the department's Preministerial Scholars program. Dr. Gardner offers a fascinating article exploring Social Crisis preaching and Prophetic Responsibility, which I heartily commend to

you. “Leading the charge in almost every period of social change,” he writes, “are preachers, responsible as prophets, who are committed to the principles of social crisis preaching: biblical proclamation that develops congregations to intentionally care about and confront the crisis in their neighbor’s community through the power of the Holy Spirit.” The Reverend Jennifer Watley Maxell writes in this issue of *JP* an accompanying review of Dr. Gardner’s “Sacred Anthology: Prophetic Radicalism for Pulpit and Pew.” Please plan to linger thoughtfully over both of these pieces.

The Reverend Sarah Johnson, the new Pastor/Head of Staff at the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church—just a short distance from the White House in Washington—shares a sermon for this issue in which she makes this claim: “I believe in a God of beautiful surprises who makes a way where there is no way; a God who, precisely when we are resigned and without hope, breaks into our lives with new life and new possibilities: a God so surprising that death itself becomes an occasion for new life; a God of an empty tomb and a risen Lord; a God for whom nothing is too wonderful.”

The Reverend Dr. Joseph F. Scrivner, a faculty member at Stillman College and Pastor of the Brown Memorial Presbyterian Church in Tuscaloosa, brings us a stirring reflection on Isaiah 58:1-12 and James 5:1-6 in which he weaves a sports analogy of “Misjudged Moments” into a powerful reflection on the righteous movement of God. God will restore and rebuild if we, God’s children, will only stop misjudging movements. “God will make us repairers of the breach,” says Dr. Scrivner, “if we will only repent.”

Carol Patterson’s piece on “Seeing, Hearing, and Knowing” will be worth a grateful read, as will Matt Fitzgerald’s “Bury the Graveyard” and Andrew Whaley’s “Giving Up on God.”

Dear readers, I believe that this Easter issue of *Journal for Preachers* is an exceptional and provocative source for preachers getting ready for what will be a new glimpse of that Resurrected One Who is the Way. May you linger thoughtfully with this issue, and may you preach with power and authority!

Faithfully yours, Ted Wardlaw