

## Editor's Foreword

I suspect that, for most of us preachers, there is no Sunday more terrifying than Easter. Most of the essays that follow in this edition of *Journal for Preachers* make this point over and over again.

De'Amon Harges, for example, a Wesleyan pastor in Indianapolis, has come to understand that “a good sermon, especially on Easter Sunday, reminds us that God is *right in front of us!* ... we have to practice hard to see, pay attention, and to remember our stories of Baptism.”

Lucinda Perera Isaacs, a pastor in Cincinnati, asserts that Resurrection involves exuberance and joy, but it is also messy. It involves death and loss,” she writes. “Old, familiar things pass away and new life emerges with all of its uncertainty and possibility ... Resurrection comes with fear, conflict, doubt, grief, and disorder. Newness,” she concludes, “doesn't fit neatly into our lives.”

Rebecca Gurney, a pastor at the Reems Creek-Beech Presbyterian Church in Weaverville, North Carolina, writes that the empty tomb is like a black hole in the middle of history, slowly pulling all of creation into its center, only for everything to emerge again on the other side—not just washed, not just a little bit nicer, but entirely, beautifully, inexplicably made new.”

Kate Haynes Murphy, a pastor in Charlotte, North Carolina, asserts that in the empty tomb, “the beloved disciple saw that there is a life which swallows up death. There is a power in forgiveness,” she says, “that breaks the bondage of sin. And there is a freedom of Spirit that comes from God and can never be incarcerated or executed.”

Daniel Cooperrider's piece, “Tree Gospel (or, Easter in October),” stresses that in the history of Christian art, “there has been a connection made between the literal wooden cross of Jesus and the mythical Tree of Life—the idea being that the cross, once a symbol of death, has now become the ultimate symbol of life.”

Pastor Drew Stockstill's piece is a unique one, as he is speaking to whomever will follow him into the ministry he is leaving. It has been, for him, a time of enormous challenges and terrific joy: “Perhaps the greatest wisdom I have gained is how to be both utterly helpless and desperately hopeful at the same time.” *JP* readers, especially those of you in your first trimester of ministry, and especially if you are struggling, take heart and do not pass over the wisdom expressed in his “Letter to the Next Pastor of Christ Church.”

In this issue of *Journal For Preachers*, be sure to read Miriam Mauritzen's sermon on John 20:1-28, Psalm 25:4-8, and Acts 9:1-9. Lectionary-based texts are thankfully still provided in more liturgical congregations, and Mauritzen demonstrates beautifully how multiple scripture passages carefully chosen can expand and resonate with one another while harmonizing with what text and themes the preacher decides to focus upon on the given day and season.

Katie Nakamura Rengers offers a book review on *The Great Dechurching*. She lifts up a common challenge in our contemporary culture in which many former parishioners are going out the back door because of a sense of irrelevance on the part of their churches. Addressing that irrelevance is a critical priority in our times, and these observations will be well worth your time.

Finally, Dear Reader, I encourage you to read and absorb Dr. Thomas G. Long's remarkable piece, "The Shock of Easter." In this brilliant article, Long asserts that "the joyful good news of Easter is an obituary and a birth announcement combined: the old world has passed away and the new has come. This is why ... the Gospels let us know that the first response of those earliest disciples was not joy but fear... Easter means that the world in which they (and we) thought we lived and moved and have our being, is but an illusion, exposed as a lie in the light of the new and real world disclosed in the Risen One ... Easter calls for a change of citizenship."

Faithfully,  
Ted Wardlaw, Editor