

Resurrection as protest

By Kevin Vandiver

Series editor's note: Throughout 2020, "Deeper understandings" will engage the ELCA's commitment to authentic diversity. Leila Ortiz will continue on this theme in the next issue.

—Kathryn A. Kleinhans, dean of Trinity Lutheran Seminary at Capital University, Columbus, Ohio



Hooray! Jesus is risen. Resurrection has come! We rightfully celebrate, don't we?

Easter is the story of the ultimate triumph of light over darkness, good over bad, and we shout for joy that the grave could not hold Jesus' body down.

The grave. The final frontier. The place where hopes and dreams die. The vast hollow where unrealized aspirations lie. The grave. The final resting place of more than just bodies. The grave. The place where corruption of the body happens. The consummation of mortality. The place of the stinging reality that life won't last forever. It claims victory over all of humanity, both young and old, one by one. The final curtain.

That's where Jesus went.

The injustices of power, greed, control and fear put innocent Jesus on the cross, and then, dead in the grave.

They hung him high, they stretched him wide, he hung his head and Jesus died. After he died, they put him in a tomb.

It was a rich man's grave, but that doesn't make it any prettier; it was a grave, nonetheless. You can hew a grave out of the finest materials and pay a lot of money for it, but that makes it no less stark, cold or final.

As the pastors of my youth used to say, "He stayed there all Friday. He stayed there all Saturday morning. He was still in there Saturday evening and even into the wee hours of Sunday."

Why do you stay there, Jesus?

Jesus stayed in that grave, enduring everything that the grave had to offer. *Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death (grave), is your sting?* (1 Corinthians 15:55).

Well, the sting of death and the victory of that grave were at Jesus' tomb that day. That's where they were.

Death and the grave started stinging. They threw their best stuff at Jesus—the sting of death and sin. They hurled at him the sting of racism. They threw the sting of sexism. They tossed at him the sting of homophobia. They side-armed the sting of xenophobia. They pitched the sin of misuse of the earth at Jesus. They lobbed the sin of righteous deeds left undone.

Death and the grave threw at Jesus everything they had but the kitchen sink.

He stayed there.

The preachers of my childhood would talk about how Jesus had stayed there, but that *early Sunday morning*, he got up with all power in his hand!

The resurrection gives us hope, because *in it*, we see the possibility of new life beyond present sorrow. There *is* hope, then, that trouble won't last always.

But *this* resurrection comes only by way of the grave. Jesus absorbed the darts of *the grave* for us to have new life. Not new life tomorrow, or sometime on a horizon that never comes, or in the sweet by and by—but *today*.



The resurrection gives us hope, because *in it*, we see the possibility of new life beyond present sorrow.

What tools do we have to preach against the ills of this world that bombard us? How do we proclaim the resurrection?

We firstly proclaim that Jesus absorbed and buried *all sin*, and we are saved. That goes for everyone. No matter who you are. Full stop.

We secondly see that the evils of injustice put Jesus on the cross, and that his rising is a protest. *In spite of* and *despite* the injustices of power, control, jealousy and fear that put Jesus on the cross, and subsequently in the grave, the resurrection serves as a sign *to us* that God *defies* injustice and will go to great lengths to oppose it—even rising from the dead. Yes, the Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world, *and* the resurrection proclaims that the Lamb of God *manifests* protest *bodily*.

What does it mean when we, like Jesus, end up being pummeled by the sins of the world? It's evident that we don't have to wait for the final grave to experience the sting of the sins and troubles of this world. What happens when we are so injured by the ills and sin present in our society that we are relegated to graves *of a sort*, where injustice swallows our hopes and aspirations to be a people of God?

And Jesus shows us that we are to fight injustice with all that we have. With every breath in our body, *and* with our actual bodies, we live into the hope of what it means to be God's people. We fight for the last, lost and least, not just for the sake of fighting, but to realize God's hope, love and presence in the world.

We protest *bodily*. We put some "skin in the game." We endure the stings, knowing that, eventually, Christ *in us*, the hope of glory, will rise to the occasion, and in *that day*, crooked places will be made straight, and the high places will be brought down.

That's why the apostle Paul can *ask*, "O grave, where is your sting? O death, where is your victory?" Because Jesus has conquered them both and taken away their power. As a result, we are invited to new life, both now and forevermore.

Alleluia. †



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