

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

April 17, 2022

MERCY

and the power of unearned grace

by Drew Downs

The gift of mercy is unearned grace. But it is also **way** more than that. It exists *outside* the earned/unearned continuum.

God's mercy shows the flaw in our very thinking. We want *everything* to exist as a reflection of whether or not it is *earned*. So we ask: *Do we deserve this? Or Have they earned the right to speak?* These concepts of *earned* and *unearned* lead us to see the whole world through the lens of *value*.

How much am I worth?

What we are *trying* to communicate about the mercy of God as unearned grace is that it doesn't actually fit that narrative at all. We cannot place a *value* on mercy. It isn't something you can win or achieve or work off like a debt. It isn't something that exists in economic terms at all! It is only, and I mean **only** ever given. And it is not only *beyond* price, it is also *unlimited*.

EASTER

Spring 2022

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

I was preparing for seminary when the film *The Passion of the Christ* was released. The film brought a centuries-long theological conversation to the public in a new way. Can we tell the story of the Crucifixion without also telling the story of the Resurrection?

Technically, yes. But *dare* we? That is the *actual* question.

There is also a way that we do the opposite: telling the story of Resurrection without crucifying Jesus. Having our Easter without our Good Friday. This is also a problem.

We are Easter people *because* we know Good Friday. We are a people of resurrection *after* death. But to get there, *we have to experience the death!*

As much as we might long to keep the hardship and struggle and pain away from ourselves; to live as people who know none of that; we are people who know love ***precisely*** because we know what it is like to live its opposite.

As we gather to experience both the Crucifixion of Jesus and his Resurrection, may we be filled with the message of love, of hope, of new life that embodies our lives. Not only in our times of true joy, but also in intense sorrow. May we know the love we long for. And let that love shine out into a world that longs for such grace as the kind we can give.

With love,
Drew

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FOR SUNDAY

Easter

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Collect

O God, who for our redemption gave your only-begotten Son to the death of the cross, and by his glorious resurrection delivered us from the power of our enemy: Grant us so to die daily to sin, that we may evermore live with him in the joy of his resurrection; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Reading

From Luke 24:1-12

"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. "

Reflection

The joy of Easter is palpable. We can feel it in our bones. These late forty days of penitence and preparation lead to a letting loose in collective joy.

The word that always comes to mind is *free*. Easter is *freeing*. After a season of feeling *restricted* by self-discipline to prepare and learn, we are now free to experience life without those constraints!

What's funny about this, of course, for those who endeavor to participate in Lent's self-denial and discipline, is that when the season is over, we often *don't* want to go back. If we've given up sugar, sugary things now taste *too* sweet. If we gave up something we once thought was necessary (caffeine?) we now know what it is like to *not* be dependent on it. And those who have taken up Bible study or devotions often don't

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want to just...stop.

We may be free from the season of self-discipline, but we've found the discipline to be life-changing.

In a sense, the true magic of Easter for many of us, is that we arrive at the day the church celebrates the transformation of death with the realization that we changed *before* now. We've arrived *already* changed.

These words in Luke's telling of the Easter story, when Mary and the other women arrive at the tomb and the figures in white ask "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" we might at once find them the strangest words and yet the most obviously right ones. For why *would* they be looking for Jesus where they saw him last *if they trusted him?*

This is what we receive in Easter: not *only* the celebration of freedom, but the centrality of trust *in* that freedom. This, of course, is not unlike seeing *hope* in the crucifixion *because of* the resurrection.

As followers of Jesus, we're not commanded to take up our crosses and follow Jesus into his death and resurrection for the fun of it. As if God has some sadistic tendency. We follow because we *trust* that death leads to resurrection. And that the death and resurrection of Jesus reflects our life of faith.

In short, we need to get better about letting things die so they can be reborn. Because that is a true act of faith.

Trusting in a God of hope. Of generosity. And of true love.

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