

**St. John's Episcopal Church**  
Jackson, Wyoming  
Sermon for Easter Day ~ March 27, 2016  
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Questions of life and death have bombarded us in recent weeks. Hard questions. Persistent questions. Complex moral, political, and theological questions. Questions, which, for most Americans, do not have simple, absolute, clear answers. What we have is a blender into which many different ingredients are being thrown and we're not at all sure what the outcome will be. Some examples...

*Local Housing:* What is to become of 100 or so of our neighbors who've been given a month to move out of their apartments so they can be remodeled?

*Terrorism:* Thus far this year, there have been at least 236 terrorist attacks, 14 in the last week alone, most of them carried out by radical jihadist organizations. How do we make sense of this and how do we address the root causes?

*Gun Violence:* There have been 11,547 violent incidents involving firearms this year, resulting in 2,936 deaths and 5,889 injuries. Of those who have died, 125 were children and 660 were teenagers. 55 of the incidents were mass shootings. How can we prevent gun violence?

*War:* Syria's civil war is the worst humanitarian crisis of our time. Half the country's pre-war population — more than 11 million people — have been killed or forced to flee their homes. The U.N. predicts there could be 4.7 million registered Syrian refugees, half of them children, by the end of 2016. Where will they go? Will they ever be allowed to return to their homeland?

*Religious Extremism, Discriminatory Legislation, Political Polarization, Access to Healthcare, Human Trafficking, Racism, the list goes on.*

And, then, we have wrestled with questions of life and death involving Jesus of Nazareth. Somehow, miraculously, in spite of his followers, the message has been passed on to us that to fulfill God's promise of salvation, he suffered, was crucified, died, was buried, and on the third day he rose victorious over death. All this, we are told, is for our sake, because in God's opinion, life is precious. That is the unique, God's eye, Easter perspective that has been handed on to us. It is perspective formed by a message that has profound moral, political, and theological implications in the face of all our questions.

*Life is precious!* That is the message of Easter. It is not so much an *answer* as it is a *witness* to a reality, a viewpoint, a conclusion that can only be fully attained by faith. It begins when we take the moral and intellectual risk of trusting a God who creates life and assigns a preciousness to life beyond what we can imagine. Such trust allows us to embrace the hope-filled message of resurrection on the basis that life is too precious to God for death to have the last word. Job asked, "If a person dies, will he live again?" We can sense a need for Job to resolve that question in a way that allows his hope to conquer his despair. When he does resolve it in the laboratory of his soul, he says, "As for me, I know that my redeemer lives and that at the last he will stand upon the earth. After my awaking, he will raise me up; and in my body I shall see God. I myself shall see, and my eyes behold him who is my friend and not a stranger." It is the perspective of Easter People that our homeless neighbors, victims of terrorism, war, gun violence, and we ourselves will see that same friend in the continuation of life beyond the mystery of death. And that

friend, the Risen Christ, calls us Easter People to bring that perspective, that Easter faith, to heal hurting neighbors here and far away.

The psalmist said, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." Presumably, that means the Lord knows more about death than we know. It is a matter of perspective; God is looking at life and death from another point of view, from the other side, as it were. When we live in him, we live his life – that is the meaning of eternal life. Seeing things through God's eyes, from God's point of view, makes such a difference in our Easter faith and such a difference in the world. Think of what such faith and hopefulness has done and still can do for the life we share with God's children on this planet, in this nation, and in this valley.

I don't know too much about the faith of those pioneers who came to Jackson Hole and transformed it into a habitable place. But they sure had it. It built this church. It guided their lives. It sustained them through war, storm, and fire. It brought the first physician and established a hospital. Faith was important here. Many of those at the center of building this community and this state have called St. John's their spiritual home. They took the message they got here seriously and exported the results.

I received an email from a friend in this community of faith the other day in which he succinctly sums this up: "I suggest to all that if society took the importance of their neighbor as equally important as the memory of this signature holiday, the world would be a significantly better community."

*Life is precious!* The Creator has provided limitless resources and placed them at the disposal of those who are willing to risk squandering them to make the point that life is precious by taking life-affirming, death-defying action to partner with God in the ongoing process of creation and its redemption. Jesus showed us how and his crucifixion is a stark reminder of what can happen when you confront the forces of inertia and the forces of darkness.

But the empty tomb affirms that life is precious. God won't let death have the last word. We cast that news into the blender to contribute hope and affirmation of the preciousness of life from the Easter perspective. The Incarnate God showed us personally in the Paschal mystery, in the cross and the empty tomb, just how precious life is. In death life is changed, not ended, for those willing to see it from his perspective and trust him to cherish and protect us, to reveal himself to us now and in the end as our friend. We need that perspective. That's why we celebrate Easter and why we will gather week-by-week extending the celebration into eternity. Every Sunday is a little Easter and a time for Easter People to strengthen one another and renew hope so we can go back to the blender with our unique God's eye Easter perspective. Our hope and the hope of the world is in the Risen Christ. It is a hope that can still change the world, but it also is a hope that transcends this world, this life.

For, as St. Paul wrote to the Church in Corinth,

"If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death" I Cor. 15:19-26.