

# *Easter Season Reflections*

*The Easter Season begins on Easter Sunday and runs through the day of Pentecost.*

*This booklet has a reflection for each week during the season.*

## Easter Week (April 9 – 15)

*A Reading from a sermon by Morgan Dix. Quoted in A Time to Turn by Christopher L. Webber. Morehouse Publishing, 2004. Pp. 110-111.*

No season of the Christian year speaks to the soul as does the Easter Tide. It is the beautiful season of the year, when the winter is ended and all things bud forth; the graves and sleeping-places of the dust are broken up and the beauty of the floral kingdom comes back to us in the fresh glory of the living green and painted leaves and with the perfume of the incense-breathing gardens of spring. Now best may the gospel of immortality be preached, when ten thousand times ten thousand witnesses confirm the word; when bud and leaf and flower, when every little branch that swells with new life of the spring, and every brook that frees itself of ice and resumes the song of the past, and every gentle bird and beast, and tiny creatures of the dust, and all that have life and health, seem to rejoice in the morning of their returning day; now comes to us the gospel of immortality, attested by a great clous of witnesses in earth, sea, and sky, and vouched for by the deeper tones of years that are past; by the testimony of all ages since Christ was here; by the voice of those who have lived and died believing that, to God, there are no dead, that “for to him all are alive.” This is the thing which has been most surely believed among us; the event from which all else is reckoned

backwards and forwards; the stay of those on their journey, the inspiration of genius, the melody of music, the strength of manners and morals, the support of consolation of the mourning heart. From the natural and the moral world, the world of history and art, the worlds of mind, of matter, and of religion, come voices announcing that Christ is risen from the dead and become the first fruits of them that sleep.

### Week of 2 Easter (April 16 – 22)

*A reading from The Simple Faith of Mister Rogers by Amy Hollingsworth. Thomas Nelson. 2005. Pp. 93-94*

Seeing the best in ourselves so that we can see the best in our neighbor may sound like a utopian dream in the world that's "jaded", "misunderstood," and filled with "hatred". Perhaps that formula only works in the Neighborhood of Make-Believe, where the main characters, like King Friday, are controlled by higher-minded puppeteers. Real people, unfortunately, are under no such constraint. Certainly mischief enters the Neighborhood from time to time, as when in anger Lady Elaine Fairchild turns the Eiffel Tower upside down. But upside down is more the natural state of the larger world outside the WQED studio where the Neighborhood resides. Even if everyone in the Neighborhood bucks the trend by treating one another with respect, other television fare comes much closer to reflecting what awaits us in the real world.

Fred once told me he didn't watch much children's television, and when he did, it was usually what was sent to him: "I've seen some sample programs, usually people who are producing children's programs send me what they consider is their best to see, so the samples that I see may be a little better than what is generally on the air each day." But he found out "what is generally on the air each day" when he stopped in to visit his grandsons on the way home from work one afternoon.

The babysitter directed him upstairs, where his grandsons were watching television. As Fred entered the room, he saw a popular superhero cartoon on the screen, with celluloid characters taking out their “neighbors” with machine guns.

I knew how Fred felt about guns; in fact, the only time I remember him taking legal action against a Mister Rogers parody was when a distributor sold T-shirts with a photo of him holding a handgun. The caption read, “Welcome to my ‘hood.” A kindly neighbor packing heat wasn’t funny to Fred, nor was seeing his grandsons watch what was being passed off as children’s television. These weren’t cartoon animals brandishing anvils and frying pans but human characters solving their problems with deadly violence.

Fred sat down next to his youngest grandson, who was about five at the time, and confessed that what was happening on the screen was scary even to him, an adult. As the violence escalated, Fred commented again, this time interjecting that people shouldn’t do that to one another. His grandson tried to allay Fred’s fears by pointing out a plot element his grandfather might have missed: the targets of the machine guns were the bad guys.

Fred quickly countered that there are better ways to treat bad people than killing them. He said his grandson looked at him in bewilderment, as if that possibility had never been weighed in the avenging hero’s scales of justice. The experience so unnerved Fred that before going to bed that night, he wrote a public service announcement for children and offered it to any station that would air it: “Some television programs are loud and scary, with people shooting and hitting each other. Well, you can do something about that. When you see scary television like that, you can turn it off. And when you do turn it off, that will show you that you are the strongest of them all. It takes a very strong person to be able to turn off scary TV.

## Week of 3 Easter (April 23 – 29)

*A reading from the Chatechetical Instructions of Theodore, Bishop of Mopsuestia, 428 CE. Quoted in Readings for the Daily Office from the Early Church. Church Hymnal Corporation, 1991. Pp. 194 – 195.*

When the bishop and the congregation have exchanged blessings, the bishop begins to give the Kiss of Peace, and the church herald, that is to say, the deacon, in a loud voice orders all the people to exchange the Kiss of Peace, following the bishop's example. This kiss which all present exchange constitutes a kind of profession of the unity and charity that exists among them. Each of us gives the Kiss of Peace to the person next to use, and so in effect gives it to the whole assembly, because this act is an acknowledgement that we have all become the single body of Christ our Lord, and so must preserve with one another that harmony that exists among the limbs of a body, loving one another equally, supporting and helping one another, regarding the individual's needs as concerns of the community, sympathizing with one another's sorrows and sharing in one another's joys.

## Week of 4 Easter (April 30 – May 6)

*A Reading from Footsteps of the Master by Harriet Beecher Stowe. Quoted in A Time to Turn by Christopher L. Webber. Morehouse Publishing, 2004. Pp. 119-120.*

There is something wonderfully poetic in the simple history given by the different evangelists of the resurrection of our Lord. It is like a calm, serene morning after a night of thunder and tempest. Those devoted women, in whose hearts love out-lived both faith and hope, rose while it was yet dark and set out with their spices and perfumes to go and pay their best tribute of affection and reverence to the dead.

They were under fear of persecution and death; they knew the grave was sealed and watched by those who had slain their Lord, but they were determined to go. There was the inconsiderate hardihood of love in their undertaking, and the artless helplessness of their inquiry, “Who will roll away the stone from the door?” shows the desperation of their enterprise. Yet they could not but believe that by prayers or tears or official payment – in some way- that stone should be rolled away.

Arrived on the spot, they saw that the sepulcher was open and empty, and Mary Magdalene, with the impulsive haste and earnestness which marks her character, ran back to the house of John, where were the mother of Jesus, and Peter, and astonished them with the tidings, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.”

Nothing is said of the Mother in this scene. Probably she was utterly worn out and exhausted by the dreadful scenes of the day before and incapable of further exertion. But Peter and John started immediately for the sepulcher. Meanwhile the two other women went into the sepulcher and stood here perplexed till suddenly they saw a vision of celestial forms, radiant in immortal youth and clothed in white. One said, “Do not be afraid: I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.”

And they remembered his words.

Furthermore, the friendly spirit bids them go and tell the disciples and Peter that their Master is risen from the dead and is going before them into Galilee – there they shall see him. And charged with this message, the women had fled from the tomb just as Peter and John came up.

The delicacies of character are strikingly shown in the brief record. John outruns Peter, stoops down and looks into the sepulcher, but that species of reticence which always appears in him controls him here – he hesitates to enter the sacred place. Now, however, comes Peter, impetuous, ardent, determined, and passes right into the tomb.

There is a touch of homelike minuteness in the description of the grave as they found it; no discovery of haste, no sign of confusion, but all in order: the linen grave-clothes laying in one place, the napkin that was about his head not lying with them but folded together in a place by itself, indicating the perfect calmness and composure with which their Lord had risen – transported with no rapture or surprise, but, in this supreme moment, maintaining the same tranquility which had ever characterized him.

It was said they saw and believed, though as yet they did not understand the saying that he must rise from the dead; and they left the place and ran with the news to his disciples.

But Mary still lingers weeping by the empty tomb – type of too many of us, who forget that our loved ones have arisen. Through her tears she sees the pitying angels, who ask her, as they might as us, “Why do you weep?” She tells her sorrowful story – they have taken away her Lord and she knows not where they have laid him – and yet at this moment Jesus is standing by her, and one word from his voice changes all.

It is not general truth or general belief that our souls need in their anguish; it is one word from Christ to *us*, it is his voice calling us by name that makes the darkness light.

## Week of 5 Easter (May 7 – 13)

*A reading from Inspired by Rachel Held Evans. Nelson Books. 2018. Pp. 158*

We spend a lot of time speculating about what God is like. We argue about it, build theologies around it, sometimes even wage war over it. We use words like omniscient and omnipotent, sovereign and trinitarian to describe a God who defies language and eclipses metaphor. I once sat at a bar between two seminary students hotly debating God's supposed immutability, accusations of heresy and supersessionism flying at one another with their spittle, their breath smelling of pretzels and beer. When nestled in my La-Z-Boy with a new theology book, its austere weight a comfort blanket to my ego, it can be easy to image God as a set of ideas, a philosophy, or a system of thought.

And yet the scandal of the gospel is that one day the God of our theology books and religious debates showed up – as a person, in flesh and blood. And while God indeed delivered a few sermons and entertained a couple of theological discussions, it is notable that according to the Gospels, when God was wrapped in flesh and walking among us, the single most occupying activity of the Creator of the universe, the Ultimate Reality, the Alpha and Omega and the great I AM of ages past and ages to come was to tell stories.

Lots and lots and lots of stories.

## Week of 6 Easter (May 14 – 20)

*A reading from a sermon of Leo the Great, Bishop of Rome, 461CE. Quoted in Readings for the Daily Office from the Early Church. Church Hymnal Corporation, 1991. Pp. 200-201.*

Beloved, the days which passed between the Lord's resurrection and his ascension were by no means uneventful; during them great sacramental mysteries were confirmed, great truths revealed. In those days the fear of death with all its horrors was taken away, and the immortality of both body and soul affirmed. It was then that the Lord breathed on all his apostles and filled them with the Holy Spirit; and after giving the keys of the kingdom to blessed Peter, whom he had chosen and set above all the others, he entrusted him with the care of his flock.

During these days the Lord joined two of his disciples as their companion on the road, and by chiding them for their timidity and hesitant fears he swept away all the clouds of our uncertainty. Their lukewarm hearts were fired by the light of faith and began to burn within them as the Lord opened up the Scriptures. And as they shared their meal with him, their eyes were opened in the breaking of bread, opened far more happily to the sight of their own glorified humanity than were the eyes of our first parents to the shame of their sin.

Throughout the whole period between the resurrection and ascension, God's providence was at work to instill this one lesson into the hearts of the disciples, to set this one truth before their eyes, that our Lord Jesus Christ, who was truly born, truly suffered and truly died, should be recognized as truly risen from the dead. The blessed apostles together with all the others had been intimidated by the catastrophe of the cross, and their faith in the resurrection had been uncertain; but now they were so strengthened by the evident truth that



when their Lord ascended into heaven, far from feeling any sadness, they were filled with great joy.

Indeed that blessed company had a great inexpressible cause for joy when it saw human nature rising above the dignity of the whole heavenly creation, above the ranks of angels, above the exalted status of archangels. Nor would there be any limit to its upward course until humanity was admitted to a seat at the right hand of the eternal Father, to be enthroned at last in the glory of him to whose nature it was wedded in the person of the Son.

### Week of 7 Easter (May 21 – 27)

*A reading from The Humanity of God by Karl Barth. Quoted in Readings in Christian Theology. Fortress Press, 1985. Pp. 79-80.*

It is when we look at Jesus Christ that we know decisively that God's deity does not exclude, but includes his humanity. Would that Calvin had energetically pushed ahead on this point in his Christology, his doctrine of God, his teaching about predestination, and then logically also in his ethics! His Geneva would then not have contained so much bitterness. It would then not be so easy to play a Heinrich Pestalozzi and, among his contemporaries, a Sebastian Castellio off against him. How could God's deity exclude his humanity, since it is God's freedom for love and thus his capacity to be not only in the heights but also in the depths, not only great but also small, not only in and for himself but also with another distinct from him, and offer himself to him? In his deity there is enough room for communion with man. Moreover God has and retains in his relation to this other one the unconditioned priority. It is his act. His is and remains the first and decisive Word, his the initiative, his the leadership. How could we see and say it otherwise when we look at Jesus Christ in whom we find man taken up into communion with God? No, God

requires no exclusion of humanity, no non-humanity, not to speak of in humanity, in order to be truly God. But we may and must, however, look further and recognize the fact that actually his deity encloses humanity in itself. This is not the fatal Lutheran doctrine of the two natures and their properties. On the contrary, the essential aim of this doctrine is not to be denied at this point but to be adopted. It would be the false deity of a false God if in his deity his humanity did not also immediately encounter us. Such false deities are by Jesus Christ once for all made a laughingstock. In him the fact is once for all established that God does not exist without man.