

Easter in the Flesh—Matthew 28: 1-10
April 9, 2023—Easter Sunday

How are you feeling this Easter? I've got to tell you I'm kind of cranky and impatient. I think there's a lot of that going around though. The pandemic has shortened our fuses, has worn down our resilience. Something has happened to us during the pandemic. It's playing out in an excruciating way on our transit services. The President of the union for Grand River Transit workers spoke recently about how things just seem to escalate a lot more quickly than it ever used to pre-pandemic. "It seems like everybody's kind of got a shorter fuse nowadays."¹ My heart breaks a few weeks ago for the family of Gabriel Magalhaes, a sixteen year old murdered on the platform at Keele station in Toronto. Gabriel's mother Andrea says at a memorial to her son, "There are no words to express the pain...I can't even describe what I feel...I've been through pain before, but my God, this is unbearable."²

Easter this year feels much less tangible than the Good Friday realities we are either personally experiencing or being fed by media of all kinds. I am worn down, some of it is personal to me. Some of it is shared like the trauma of the pandemic. The climate crisis is evident now in our weather, in species loss, in disease spread. Democracy is under attack; fascism is on the rise. Reactionary hate against racialized people and 2slgbtq+ people is being normalized and legislated. Economic inequality and homelessness is becoming entrenched, encampments are now a regular feature of our cities. This is ground shifting, heartbreaking stuff. If we can be honest, death and suffering have not been defeated.³

Does that sound like heresy? I hope you'll extend me the grace of our *Statement of Welcome* in allowing me to believe, but ask large questions. I feel theologically less alone this week when I come across a reflection by former United Church of Canada Moderator David Giuliano who says, "The resurrection...is aspirational. This new life is celebrated poetically, with metaphors and symbols—the curving neck of fiddleheads, crocuses sprouting in the snow, the song of a sparrow in a blossoming cherry tree, the restoration of broken relationships, an ineffable inner awakening—each one true, beautiful and full of promise. Good Friday, on the other hand, is as literal as a grave. The fear, despair, injustice, violence and suffering of God on the cross persists in the flesh."⁴

¹ James Charanni, CBC News, *Abusive incidents on Grand River Transit stable but more severe, says union president*, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/kitchener-waterloo/grand-river-transit-violence-abusive-union-1.6728659>, January 30, 2023.

² CBC News, *Toronto mom who lost son in subway stabbing calls for more supports for people in crisis*, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/andrea-magalhaes-interview-ttc-fatal-stabbing-as-it-happens-1.6792936>, March 27, 2023.

³ David Giuliano, *The fear and suffering of God on a cross persists in the flesh*, <https://davidgiulianoca.wordpress.com/home/blog/?fbclid=IwAR25-Hx524jL94imgMyeFZlVvMA6bSXfD6g8p0senJncQxQJ4TmmoDxq5dg>

⁴ Giuliano

You see if there's one thing that's clear about Holy Week it's that Easter is what God does, Good Friday is what humans do. I guess I'm weighed down by all our Good Friday decisions as a species lately. There's that line in Deuteronomy where God says to Israel wandering in the desert, "I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live..."⁵ When I first remember hearing it, I think "what a strange thing for God to say, who wouldn't choose life?" But we don't always choose life, we keep choosing death, it's so evident, so painful. "As literal as a grave", David Giuliano says. I'm feeling the weight of that and the poetry and metaphors of Easter seem so weak in the face of these visceral realities.

In reflecting on this struggle and angst I come to a very uncomfortable realization. I have something in common with people who are seduced by fascism and the strong, saviour leader myths of these movements. I too want a strong, muscular leader to set things as I think they should be. I want God and Jesus to fix all this, to make the last first and the first last, to make our leaders servants of all, to open the floodgates of justice so that it rolls down like waters. I want Easter to be as much an in your face reality as Good Friday seems to be and I want God to do it now by any means necessary. How quickly I forget the lesson of Christmas—the coming of God among us in the form of a helpless child born in the midst of empire to a subjugated people and poor refugee parents. How do we live in these tensions between faith in the vulnerable God of love and the heartbreak and impatience of living in a Good Friday world?

As I struggle with all this, good old Job comes to mind. Job of the Hebrew scriptures who goes through more calamities in a week than most of us will go through in a lifetime. Job who spends chapter upon chapter railing against God who has according to Job betrayed Job's faithfulness. Underlying these rants is one question, "Why God?" Why are you doing this to me, why are you allowing this to happen? I'm reminded that things start to turn for Job when after thirty one chapters, in exasperation he says, "Oh that I had one to hear me...let the almighty answer me!"⁶ Do you notice the shift? Job moves from asking 'why God?' to asking, 'where are you God? The writer, Anne Lamott, says something that seems fitting to Job, "When you give up all hope, you're probably only giving up the hope of getting your own outcome."⁷ I wonder if that is what Easter is asking of me, to give up hope in the outcomes I want and questioning why God isn't giving them to me and instead ask, "Where are you God?"

If I take that question to our faith story this morning the thing that is abundantly clear is God is not in the tomb. God is not in that place of death. God has gone on ahead inviting us along. Where are you God? God is in trans people fighting for the right to simply exist and calling us to a new, more whole and healing approach to gender. God is in racialized people urging white people out of the tombs of privilege and colonial mindsets into a resurrected society of equality and mutuality. God is in people of all

⁵ Deuteronomy 30: 19.

⁶ 31: 35

⁷ Anne Lamott, *Breaking the surface*, "Salon", <https://www.salon.com/1999/04/01/01lamo/>, April 1, 1999.

ages, but especially the young, begging leaders to stop the death spiral of CO² emissions and transition to an economy that puts creation at the centre. God is in the homeless people setting up camp in our cities laying bare the deathly inequality in our society, calling us by their presence to a life giving politics and economics. Where has God gone on ahead in your life, calling you out of a tomb to new life?

God keeps doing God things, like resurrection, like Easter. Grace abounds, but it will not be forced on us, no matter how much I wish it were so. The choice is firmly ours. It's a choice Andrea Magalhaes makes, you remember the mother of sixteen year old Gabriel, a choice that moves me to tears. Amid her pain, she says this, "Nothing will bring my son back...can we do better? I'm not going to say this person doesn't have to respond for what he did. He does. But, we need to start talking about violence and the root causes of violence..." "I am hoping that people will raise their voices so we can be heard...More needs to be done so that people don't get to the point where they are in crisis," "Honestly, I wanted to just hide in my bed and never get up again, but I am taking every ounce of strength I have left to just get his story out there."⁸ In the midst of death, Andrea Magalhaes chooses life, chooses resurrection. Easter in the flesh my friends, as real as anything Good Friday can throw our way.

So, look to the world with resurrection eyes, eyes that see the vulnerable One calling, leading amid our own and the world's pain. Follow the One who has gone on ahead urging us on to new life. Urging us to make Easter a tangible, physical, literal reality in our lives, in our church, in our community, in our world. Urging us to celebrate Easter not only as a day, but as a way of life. May it be so.

Rev. Joe Gaspar

⁸ CBC News, *Toronto mom...*