

From Pastor Marissa Becklin

Celebrating Easter While War Rages

At the end of March my husband and I had the opportunity to see Billy Joel in concert, much to our joy. He has been a lifelong favorite for both of us, and his lyrics were the backdrop to our drive east to move to Pennsylvania from the Midwest three years ago. As we were preparing to see him we discussed how our favorite Billy Joel songs have changed over time: while mine used to be *My Life*, I now consider *We Didn't Start The Fire* my favorite because the lyrics hit me in a new way this year. While it of course makes a fun song to try and memorize all the words to, the impact of the song is relevant in any decade: there is so much unrest, disaster, war, injustice, and complexity in this world that it feels like it's on fire. The fire isn't new, and even when we tried to put it out, it kept burning, because the problems of this world are inextricably linked to the brokenness of humanity.

Each year as I prepare to preach the Easter story, I take time to reflect on where this world that we live in is groaning for the healing power of resurrection, and each year there is new pain to pray about. This story of Easter is relevant even today, 2000 years after the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, because the pain of the world remains fresh in our hearts. At the time that I write this newsletter article I am praying particularly for radical, transformative peace to fill the hearts of leaders in Russia and Ukraine, for safety and compassion for all refugees and immigrants throughout the world, and for the healing of the earth that is so desperately groaning. By the time you read this surely there will be so much more to hold in prayer, because that is how this world goes—the fire of brokenness keeps burning.

While this brokenness continues, while war rages, while we struggle with health concerns and refugee crises and ecological disaster, it can feel strange or even wrong to celebrate Easter. Celebrating while war rages feels disrespectful. And it *is* disrespectful, if that celebrating happens with blinders on. Put differently, if we celebrate the good news of Jesus' resurrection without any thought of the pain of our neighbors near and far, if we experience Easter as something just for *us* as individuals without reflecting on and praying for the hope of Easter for all people, then we are doing it wrong and disrespectfully.

But there is, of course, another way. Jesus' resurrection took place originally during a time of severe unrest and danger. The entire story is framed by the presence of military guards at Jesus' tomb, after all, who were there to make sure that they could squash out any kind of hope that tried to unfold in the days after Jesus' death. People are starving, are being crushed by military might and terror, and are longing for hope. What they get is Jesus, resurrected, having defeated the powers of empire, might, fear, sin, and death. In his resurrection love has prevailed, and Jesus is ready to share the news of grace's unyielding power in the face of brokenness. Brokenness is unrelenting, Jesus says, but it is no match for God.

This message of hope, of promise, and of unending and self-sacrificing love is one delivered by Jesus directly to a hurting world in the shadow of war. It is not just an individual message (not just for us to hold in our hearts and hide under a bushel), but it is also a message for our whole world. Peace is on its way. Resurrection is always the end of God's story. Take heart because God's dream for us is bigger than war, and even as war rages we can celebrate the power of resurrection by praying for our neighbors, by loving one another well, and by extending ourselves on behalf of others for the sake of a world in need.

When war rages, Easter's promise reigns supreme: resurrection is on its way. In the meantime, we are called to be ambassadors of resurrection right within this broken world. May God help us along the way.

Amen

Pastor Marissa